

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE ROLES OF INTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS, LEADERSHIP STYLE, AND WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY IN BUILDING LEADER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS AND FACILITATING RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

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Through a qualitative case study, this dissertation's purpose was to explore the confluence of internal public relations, leadership styles, and organizational culture—specifically in a spiritually based workplace—in order to better understand their influence on leader-employee relationship management. The organization researched was a bank with approximately 110 employees including several branch locations. Data collection triangulation included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis of relevant internal publications and communications. Analysis employed grounded theory strategies using the constant comparison method. Results indicated that this confluence, driven by the founder/top leader's faith and vision, enacted authentic/transformational/principle-centered/servant leadership style, spiritually based organizational culture, and open, two-way symmetrical communication to foster intentional, positive, people-driven cultural maintenance, interpersonal communication, and employee empowerment/growth strategies. In turn, this hybrid environment fostered strong relationship building between employees and

organizational leaders as well as between employees across the organization. The confluence also promoted organizational unity as well as intentional leadership development among employees through both specific career goal planning and opportunities for honing individual employees' leadership skills. These outcomes feed back into the leadership, culture, and communication processes to perpetuate a cycle of organizational success. This study extended previous research in internal public relations, leadership styles, and organizational culture by examining their confluence and resulting outcomes to produce a model for internal public relationship building. Ultimately, this model and the understanding enhanced by it offers value to organizational leaders and public relations practitioners as they seek to build more successful leader-employee relationships as well as relationships between employees across the organization through heightened trust, control mutuality, job satisfaction, and commitment. The research also offers value by describing a model that encourages greater empowerment and leadership development among employees at various organizational levels, potentially serving to increase productivity and reach organizational goals.

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WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY IN BUILDING LEADER-EMPLOYEE  
RELATIONSHIPS AND FACILITATING RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

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## Dedication

To my husband, Jon, and my three children, Stephen, Katie, and Christy, for their love, sacrifice, patience, support, and prayers during these five long years.

To my Lord and Savior Jesus, who made the ultimate sacrifice so that I might live, who carried me through this journey when I was unable to carry myself, and who revealed to me the importance of focusing on *internal* public relations.

“Woe to you. . . . You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. . . . First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.” (Matthew 23:25-26)

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*Figure 1.* McCown's proposed model of internal relationship building in CommunityBankCorp.



## Chapter One – Introduction

As the strategic practice of public relations continues to experience a paradigmatic shift from promotion and one-way communication toward two-way communication and relationship management between organizations and key publics (Heath, 2001; Ledingham, 2003), practitioners and scholars alike are recognizing the need to further explore the relationship between organizational leaders and their internal publics. Employees' communication about their organizations to outsiders can have significant consequences on organizational effectiveness and reputation (J. E. Grunig & Hung, 2002). Employees also can become internal activists and create issues for organizations (McCown, 2005b, 2007), further underscoring the importance of understanding organizational leader-internal publics relationship dynamics. Finally, leadership may exist not only in an organization's dominant coalition or top leadership/decision-making body (J. E. Grunig, 1992), but also among employees at various organizational levels (Berger, 2005). This type of bottom-up or dispersed, informal leadership can lead to employee groups rising as leaders to influence organizational decisions.

According to the excellence theory, organizations that value communication excellence exhibit to some degree fourteen different characteristics (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Among these characteristics, several apply specifically to internal public relations, or the way an organization manages communication between organizational decision-makers and employees. First, scholars (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) found that organizations that implement

two-way symmetrical internal public relations and foster a participative organizational culture where employees have significant input into organizational decision-making are more likely to practice excellent internal public relations. Second, public relations practitioners that have power in or direct access to the organization's dominant coalition are best able to influence the organization's world view on public relations, to help set goals, and to identify and manage relationship-building communication with strategic publics, including internal ones. In addition, because of their important boundary spanning role, public relations practitioners act as liaisons between organizational leadership and internal publics, relaying messages and helping to ensure that voices on both sides are heard and responded to. According to the excellence theory, these public relations characteristics lead to employee job satisfaction, which can also increase productivity (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002).

Relatedly, the power-control perspective on organizational power helps frame employee public relations. The power-control perspective posits that organizational leaders will set up organizational structures that satisfy—that are good enough—and then beyond that make decisions based on their own interests in power and control (Dozier & L. A. Grunig, 1992; Berger, 2005). This puts emphasis on leadership style. Management scholars have studied many types of leadership styles in the past century (see Bass, 1985 for a thorough review). The excellence study (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) determined that authoritarian leadership is not conducive to excellent public relations, external or internal. Limited research in public relations has explored specific types of leadership styles that would encourage

public relations excellence. Exceptions include Aldoory and Toth (2004), who studied public relations leaders' preferences for specific organizational leadership styles, and my own studies (McCown, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007) regarding leader influence—specifically leadership style influence—on internal public relations practices. In particular, I found that transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), with its emphasis on employee empowerment, job satisfaction, and organizational goal achievement, fosters the participative workplace culture argued for by the excellence theory (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). However, no research found specific ways that leadership style and internal public relations practices intersect to encourage leadership development among employees.

Clearly, the relatively unexplored interplay of these concepts prompts the need for greater understanding about the relationship between leadership, public relations practice, and internal publics. Exploring the influence of leadership on internal public relations, leader-employee relationship building, and leadership development within the context of a specific type of organizational culture (Denison, 1990; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985)—the spiritually based workplace (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999)—provided the focus for this dissertation. Wagner-Marsh and Conley (1999) proposed a “fourth wave” theory of spiritually based organizations that suggests that such organizations embrace several key concepts that appear to dovetail with key characteristics of transformational leaders (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), as well as with public relations relationship indicators (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999); thus, the organizational context of a spiritually based firm provided a fertile environment in

which to explore leadership, internal public relations, and leader-employee relationship management.

### Concepts/Terminology

This dissertation research explored and discussed the confluence of four major concepts: internal public relations excellence, specific leadership styles, leader/employee relationship management, and organizational culture (specifically, in the spiritually based workplace). A comprehensive literature review provided in chapter two more thoroughly describes previous research in each area and provides explication for each concept. However, the following offers a brief definition of each key concept used in the study.

*Internal public relations excellence.* At its essence, public relations excellence (L. A. Grunig, 1992) involves the practice of public relations that contributes to organizational effectiveness by helping to reconcile organizational goals with publics' expectations. This occurs through implementing public relations practices that builds long-term, quality, organization-publics relationships and is best facilitated when key public relations practitioners have access to or power within the organization's dominant coalition. Public relations excellence with internal (or employee) publics best occurs in organic, participative organizational cultures where employees enjoy two-way, symmetrical communication with organizational leaders and shared decision-making (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). In this dissertation, I have defined internal public relations in this way, but also further tested the idea that internal public relations excellence under a specific leadership style in a spiritually based organizational culture is also characterized by

strong relationships between employees and organizational leaders, as demonstrated by the presence of key relationship indicators (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999).

*Leadership style.* Leadership can take on many forms and styles (see Bass, 1985). In this dissertation, I explored the influence of leadership styles (those most likely to be found in the particular research setting for this dissertation) on internal public relations practices, leader-employee relationship management, and leadership development among employees. First, transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) is characterized by employee empowerment, fostering job satisfaction, and ultimately helping employees achieve individual and organizational goals; in addition, transformational leadership practices often create a specific organizational culture and workplace atmosphere that includes employee participation and shared decision-making through a variety of actions and tools (Yukl, 2002). Relatedly, authentic leadership suggests that “the authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders. The authentic leader is true to him/herself and the exhibited behavior positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243). Other applicable leadership styles include servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977, 1978), which posits that the primary purpose of a business should be to create a positive impact on its employees and the greater community, and principle-centered leadership, which brings heightened attention to the importance of ethics, character, and principles in organizational leadership, as well as to the tone those concepts set for organizational culture and performance

(Covey, 1992). Leadership is not limited, however, to those people in top organizational positions; as Berger (2005, 2007) noted, power may exist in multiple coalitions throughout an organization, suggesting that leadership among various employees or employee groups may also influence organizational decisions. Moreover, some leadership styles encourage leadership development in subordinates (employees) as well (e.g., Bass, 1985; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Through this study, I have extended understanding of how these types of leadership styles influence and work together with internal public relations practices to encourage leader-employee relationship building and relational outcomes within a specific organizational context.

*Leader-employee relationship management.* Organizational communication scholars have long studied superior-subordinate communication at various levels within the organization (e.g., Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Fairhurst, 1993; Farmer, Slater, & K. S. Wright, 1998; Haas, B. D. Sypher, & H. E. Sypher, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Pincus, Rayfield, & Cozzens, 1991; Romm, 1999). However, because the power-control perspective (Dozier & L. A. Grunig, 1992; Berger, 2005) applies to top organizational decision-makers and their ability to set organizational structure, culture, and processes/practices, in this dissertation I have explored relationships (developed and maintained through communication/internal public relations) between the organization's top leader and employees. In particular, I tested relationship management indicators, including trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999), between the

top leader and the organization's employees. Other relational outcomes included employee empowerment or leadership development among employees.

*Organizational culture (the spiritually based firm)*. Schein (1985) defined organizational culture as a set of assumption patterns developed through group consensus and shared experiences that are "valid" enough to teach new group members (p. 9). Key elements include a consensual mission statement and shared purposes or "reasons to be"—both economic and esoteric (p. 53). In short, according to Schein, organizational culture allows members to work together comfortably and focus on their jobs. Organizational culture may also include employee involvement (Denison, 1990), shared values among organizational members (Kotter & Heskett, 1992), autonomy and entrepreneurship (fostering creativity and independence), and respect for the individual through idea solicitation and hands-on involvement (Peters & Waterman, 1982, pp. 14-15). In this dissertation, I have drawn from these scholars to define organizational culture.

Extending his definition of organizational culture, Schein (1985) also contended that religion often provides a context for organizational members to understand difficult or "unexplainable" situations and "provides guidelines for what to do in ambiguous, uncertain, and threatening situations" (p. 79). Defining a specific type of organizational culture, Wagner-Marsh and Conley (1999) proposed a theory of the spiritually based firm that suggests that such organizations embrace several key concepts critical for achieving a spiritually based organizational culture: "honesty with self [in the organizational leader], articulation of the corporation's spiritually based philosophy, mutual trust and honesty with others, commitment to quality and

service, commitment to employees, and selection of personnel to match the corporation's spiritually-based philosophy" (p. 292). Spiritually based organizations, according to the theory, need not ascribe to business goals that might be labeled as spiritual—such as religious conversion, overtly spiritual services, or religious products; however, these organizations' underlying philosophies are spiritual in nature, often due to the organizational founders' and leaders' spiritual values. Spirituality can find its roots in a variety of religions, practices, and experiences. However, in this dissertation, I limited my exploration to a firm with an organizational culture rooted in the evangelical Christian tradition of spirituality. According to Marsden (1984), people self-identifying as evangelical Christians typically emphasize the following beliefs: "Reformation doctrine and the final authority of Scripture; the real, historical character of God's saving work recorded in scripture; eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; the importance of evangelism and missions; and the importance of a spiritually transformed life" (pp. ix-x). Marsden particularly underscored evangelical Christians' unifying, "shared positive evangelical aspirations to win the world for Christ" (p. xii).

#### Research Purpose and Method

Against this backdrop of four converging phenomena, then, this study had four specific goals. The first goal was to explore application and expand understanding of the influence of several potentially existing leadership styles—transformational (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), authentic (Lutans & Avolio, 2003), and perhaps principle-centered (Covey, 1992) or servant (Greenleaf, 1977, 1978)—on internal public relations practices in a particular organization. Although I completed



several studies opening the door to this particular topic (2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007), further exploration and testing has assisted in greater theoretical development regarding leader influence on internal public relations practices. A second goal was to test the application of relationship management theory to the organizational leader-internal public relationship within the context of a particular organization. My previous work (McCown 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007) explored several relationship management concepts such as trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999), but again, further exploration has extended relationship management theory to an internal public relations setting. The third and fourth goals involved discovering potential confluence between certain leadership styles, excellent internal public relations practices, and leader-employee relationship management and relational outcomes within the context of a spiritually based firm (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999).

In pursuing these goals, I conducted individual in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis in a case study of employee leadership development and relationship management between organizational leadership and the internal public—as facilitated by public relations practices—in a spiritually based firm. Over the course of four months, I studied a corporation with more than 100 employees in several branch locations; this organization is further described in chapter three. I conducted 21 interviews with organizational top leadership, public relations staff, and employees representing all levels at the organization. In addition, I spent approximately 10 hours observing employee-leader interactions and meetings. Finally, document analysis included an examination of the organization's internal

communication materials, including a corporate foundations booklet, vision and values statement, web site, and employee newsletters.

### Delimitations

Due to the broad nature of each research area as well as time constraints, delimitations helped to more specifically set the scope of my study. First, regarding employee public relations excellence, although a broad understanding of publics provides the framework for this study, I did not test for (nor did I find) employee publics as internal activists in my research organization. Therefore, I excluded activism literature from my literature review and subsequent interview protocols. Second, I narrowed my focus in the extremely broad field of leadership to leadership styles that I found in my particular research organization, namely transformational, principle-centered, servant, and authentic. Third, the relationship management literature covers public relations relationships in a broad range of contexts. This study examined only relationships between an organizational leader and members of the employee public and how internal public relations practices contribute to those. Finally, regarding organizational culture and the spiritually based firm, although spirituality may include many religious and spiritual traditions and practices, I delimited to evangelical Christianity under the term spirituality. Again, this is due to the spirituality of my research organization's leader, who both serves as founder and president of the organization. My espousal of the same faith traditions as the organization's top leader may have also facilitated access to this company.

### Significance of the Research

This research contributes to both public relations scholarship and practice through exploring the confluence of several important and growing phenomena. In a recent report to the PRSA Commission on Public Relations Education, Toth (2006) found that public relations leaders perceived an increased importance on organizations' internal (employee) publics. In addition, Toth also reported practitioners' perceived urgency to align public relations practice with relationship model-based business strategies; this dovetails with recent public relations theory regarding relationship management as well. Regarding leadership, the Plank Center for Public Relations Studies at the University of Alabama ([www.plankcenter.ua.edu](http://www.plankcenter.ua.edu)) recently began encouraging scholarship linking leadership and public relations through significant research grant funding for studies in this area. Finally, according to The Princeton Religious Research Index, religious beliefs and practices have seen a dramatic increase in the past decade (Gunther, 2001), with recent print publications and broadcast news programs featuring numerous stories surrounding growing workplace spirituality in the United States.

This dissertation contributes to public relations theory by building a model to describe the interplay of these phenomena. However, this study aims to go beyond scholarly contributions to provide practical value as well. As noted earlier, Toth (2006) reported that practitioners themselves have identified internal communication as a key area of concern for future public relations effectiveness. I believe the results and interpretations of this dissertation research will help shed light on how internal public relations may be practiced with even greater success, particularly through a case study of a particular type of leadership's influence within the context of a

specific organizational culture. By developing a model to describe the confluence of one organization's leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations practices, I have offered a normative description of how practitioners and leaders might work together to develop effective internal public relations practices with their own internal publics or employees. Ultimately, this model and the understanding enhanced by it offers value to organizational leaders and public relations practitioners as they seek to build more successful leader-employee relationships as well as relationships between employees across the organization through heightened trust, control mutuality, job satisfaction, and commitment. The research also offers value by describing a model that encourages greater empowerment and leadership development among employees at various organizational levels, potentially serving to increase productivity and reach organizational goals.

#### Outline of the Dissertation

The second chapter of this dissertation reviews the major theoretical concepts framing this dissertation. These include public relations and publics, focusing particularly on employees as an organization's internal public; internal public relations excellence and leadership as it relates to public relations excellence; relationship management, including relationship antecedents; power-control theory; potentially relevant theories of leadership, focusing attention on those potentially relevant to the current study; employee communication, including workplace communication climate and leader-follower communication; and definitions of organizational culture, focusing specifically on the spiritually based workplace.

Chapter two forms the theoretical basis for my research and will be referenced throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

Chapter three, the methodology chapter, details my rationale for choosing a qualitative case study to explore the study's research questions, and chapter four is the compilation of data collection results from interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. I have organized the chapter around the four research questions found at the end of chapter two. Interview participants, researcher observations, and content from internal document analysis clearly identified the founder's religious faith and vision as the organization's driving force; growing out of that faith, specific leadership styles, cultural values, and internal communication processes worked consistently and cooperatively to foster a hybrid environment conducive to specific relational and employee leadership development outcomes.

The final chapter offers conclusions, limitations, and implications of the research; a proposed model; and directions for future study. The results raised important insights into the confluence of internal public relations and leadership style within the context of the spiritually based firm workplace culture. In particular, outcomes of this confluence included relational strength between employees and organizational leaders as well as between employees across the organization. In addition, the confluence appears to promote organizational unity and strong leadership development among employees, whether through career goals and positional advancement or through honing individual leadership skills in their employee groups. Appendices include recruitment materials, IRB and additional consent forms, and the interview protocol.

## Chapter Two – Conceptualization

The purpose of this dissertation research was to explore the interplay of leadership style, internal public relations, leader-employee relationship management, and leadership development among employees within the context of a spiritually based workplace. Specifically, this study expanded understanding of leadership style influence on internal public relations, tested the application of relationship management theory to the organizational leader-internal public relations, and discovered confluence between particular types of leadership style, excellent internal public relations, leader-employee relationship management, and leadership development among employees within a spiritually based firm.

In this chapter, several key research streams provide a framework for the research. First, I explicate the concepts of public relations and employee publics. I discuss relevant research regarding internal public relations excellence and leadership as it relates to public relations excellence. Second, I explore public relations as relationship management, and explicate the relationship antecedents. Third, I describe theories of leadership and public relations power, beginning with the power-control perspective. In particular, I discuss transformational leadership, principle-centered leadership, servant-leadership, and authentic leadership, due to their appearance in the type of organization in which this study is situated. Finally, I discuss definitions of organizational culture, focusing specifically on the spiritually based workplace, which provides understanding of the organizational context in which the dissertation research was conducted. I also briefly discuss literature related to leadership and

organizational culture. I end this chapter with the research questions that guided this study.

## Public Relations, Internal Publics, and Employee Communications

### *Definitions of public relations*

Public relations has been defined as “the management of communication between an organization and its public” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 7). More recently, Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2006) refined this definition to include organizational managers’ or leaders’ responsibilities as well as relationship negotiation, suggesting that public relations is “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 6). Of particular note, Vercic and Grunig (2000) suggested that public relations is situated in organizations and must be understood in relationship to organizational practices, economics, power, structure, and culture. In the landmark excellence study, sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators, L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) also discussed the role of public relations as communication management crucial to helping organizations build strong relationships with key publics; in fact, the final excellence study book (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) highlighted this relationship-building function as the greatest value of public relations to the organizations it serves.

Taking a more rhetorical-critical approach, Botan (1989) offered that public relations is a process “using communication to exchange meaning between organizations and their publics” (p. 100). J. E. Grunig and White (1992) noted that in

addition to building relationships with all publics affected by organizational action, organizations have a moral obligation to make those relationships increasingly dialogical. Toth and Heath (1992) concurred, positing that dialogue is both the goal and the ethical responsibility of public relations, serving society through open discussion of vital viewpoints from both organizations and their publics.

For this study, I have melded these management-based and rhetorical definitions together, because collaboratively, they highlight public relations' situational reality within the context of the organization as well as the organization's—and, by implication, the organizational leaders'—responsibility for managing communication to build relationships with key publics. They also address the fact that it is in these very relationships that leaders and employees find meaning, and that all voices are valuable in organizational-publics relationships. Thus, in my study, I view public relations as the management function that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics through dialogic communication and by offering a balance of cooperation and dominance between communicators—to give voice and meaning to all parties involved.

#### *Theories of publics related to internal publics*

Because public relations as a discipline carries the specific responsibility of building and nurturing relationships between an organization and its many publics, it is important to build a foundation of understanding regarding the term publics before narrowing specifically to the focus of this study, internal (employee) publics.

Bringing together many views, Vasquez and Taylor (2001) categorized publics into four perspectives: mass, situational, agenda-building, and homo narrans.



Finding roots in democratic philosophy, Vasquez and Taylor's mass publics perspective normatively defines a public as a permanent, collective entity that should participate in self governance; communication occurs through the democratic process as the public initiates communication and action in response to civic concerns. In the agenda-building view of publics, the scholars suggested that publics arise around political issues; they exist because of their involvement and influence in political conflicts, and their duty is to communicate in order to mobilize support and expand political issues so that they enter the radar screen (agenda) of political decision-makers. Vasquez and Taylor also classified a homo narrans perspective on publics, suggesting that these "evolved" publics are more "communication-centered" (p. 146). In this view, publics are rhetorical communities of people who share a symbolic reality they have created in response to a particular problem or situation. They exist as a public because they have participated in a communicative process surrounding an event of concern and have developed a "group consciousness" as a result (p. 147).

Vasquez and Taylor's (2001) fourth categorization of publics, the situational perspective (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), has particularly moved public relations theory forward in describing the organization-publics relationship. Some scholars have used the terms "publics" and "stakeholders" somewhat synonymously. For example, scholars have defined stakeholders as "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization" (Freeman, 1984, p. 25); as those people who can affect organizational goal attainment (Lerbinger, 1997); as contributing to an organization's ability to create wealth (Post, Preston, & Sachs, 2002); as "persons or groups that

hold something of value that can be used as rewards or constraints in exchange for goods, services, or organizational policies and operating standards” (Heath, 1997, p. 28); and as creators of organizational structure through organizational communication and shared zones of meaning (Heath, 1994, 1997).

Building on ideas from Ferguson (1984) and others, several scholars (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 2000; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992) noted subtle differences between the terms publics and stakeholders. Stakeholders, they argued, are connected to organizations because of the potential consequences they may have on each other; thus, stakeholders have a “stake” in an organization. However, because members in the stakeholder category are often passive, public relations practitioners must carefully analyze stakeholders to set strategic organizational communication and relationship-building priorities. When stakeholders become more aware or active in their behaviors, moving from passive to active communication about a particular issue, they enter the category of publics. Thus, stakeholders emerge as publics when they begin to recognize particular issues affecting them. Publics then organize, take actions, communicate with, and exert pressure on the organizations posing the problems or opportunities in an attempt to effect response or change.

*Situational theory of publics.* J. E. Grunig (1997) built on Dewey (1927) and Blumer (1966) to develop a situational theory of publics, suggesting that publics act as a result of three independent variables in any given situation: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. These three variables influence a public’s active (information seeking) and passive (information processing)

communicative behaviors. The higher a public's problem recognition and level of involvement, and the lower the constraint recognition, the more that public will actively seek information, increasing potential effects on an organization.

The situational theory of publics provides a basis for public relations practitioners to measure, identify, and segment publics in order to better understand their nature and to appropriately plan organizational communication. J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) suggested that publics move from being of no consequence to the organization to a three-stage development process ranging from latent to active communication behaviors. J. E. Grunig and Repper (1992) further refined publics into four theoretical types: all-issue publics, apathetic publics, single-issue publics, and hot-issue publics.

For public relations practitioners to best plan organization-publics communication and relationship-building, segmentation must occur (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992); this applies to internal publics as well. As publics become increasingly active, strategic organizational-publics communication can also increase, particularly at the "issues" stage, where publics' behavioral and communicative activities have critical consequences (J. E. Grunig, 1997; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002).

Several scholars (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Friedman & Miles, 2002, 2004; Frooman, 1999; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992; J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 2000; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; Hallahan, 2001; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997) have researched and developed theoretical public relations programs for dealing with publics as they move from the active stage to an issues stage. As publics evolve

through these stages, organizational communication processes with those publics should shift from long-term, relationship-building communication to greater public involvement in organizational decision-making processes and greater use of mass media and interpersonal communication. Thus, practitioners most effectively manage issues through strategically involving publics in organizational decision-making processes before problems become recognized as issues.

Clearly, segmenting and monitoring publics or stakeholders—internal as well as external—to develop and implement strategic communication and relationship-building activities are recognized as crucial organizational activities. Although some management scholars (i.e., Post et al., 2002) do not specify organizational roles responsible for these tasks, public relations scholars (i.e., J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 2000) assign this function to public relations managers who contribute “to overall strategic management by diagnosing the environment to make the overall organization aware of stakeholders, publics, and issues as they evolve” (p. 312).

#### *Research in public relations related to internal publics*

Some scholars (i.e., Karlberg, 1996) have suggested that public relations research has paid far too little attention to the voices of publics in the organization-publics relationship equation. In particular, as PRSA’s Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) pointed out, recently identified public relations trends have practitioners and scholars calling for increased focus on an organization’s internal public—its employees—as a key public (p. 20).

According to L. A. Grunig and associates (2002), an organization has excellent public relations practices, and, by extension, is more effective if it manifests

certain characteristics. Looking at an organization's communication function from a public relations perspective, scholars (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) identified 14 characteristics of excellent public relations programs. Of particular relevance to this dissertation research, the excellence study team suggested that organizations should adopt a two-way symmetrical communication worldview—also called the mixed motives model (Dozier et al., 1995; Murphy, 1991) or collaborative advocacy (Spicer, 1997)—which strives to balance, over time, an organization's interests with those of its internal and external publics. Specifically, J. E. Grunig (1992) posited that excellent, two-way symmetrical public relations both advocates for the organization by influencing publics to line up with organizational goals and collaborates with publics to respond to their needs through organizational reshaping. Relatedly, the excellence study team called for organizational leaders to practice two-way, symmetrical internal communication by “staying close” to employees—one of an organization's strategic publics.

To best assist organizational leaders in developing an organization's symmetrical communication systems (internally and externally), excellence study scholars posited that the public relations director should have power in or with the organization's dominant coalition, or decision-making leadership, which sets the tone for mission, structure, culture, and policies (J. E. Grunig, 1992). Thus, a fluid process or “moving equilibrium” (J. E. Grunig, 2001, p. 24) develops, whereby public relations practitioners use research and dialogue to manage communication between organizational leaders and their publics (including employees), bringing about “symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 12) for both parties. In

this way, practitioners facilitate and sustain mutually beneficial organization-publics relationships through communication symmetry.

By extension, excellent dominant coalitions (leaders) network heavily with employees, building relationships through communication and interaction (J. E. Grunig, 1992). Leaders also encourage symmetrical internal communication through employee participation in decision-making. As L.A. Grunig et al. (2002) argued, participative cultures foster a teamwork atmosphere where organizational leaders value employees “as whole people, not just employees” (p. 483). In this culture, the dominant coalition and employees share both vision and power; although leaders relinquish some power by encouraging a participative process, the organization gains power collectively through employee empowerment and decision-making autonomy. Excellent leaders also help create “order out of the chaos that empowerment of people can create” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 16). In addition, organic organizational structure encourages excellent internal public relations through decentralized, less formal, and often more complex communication processes, allowing room for employee participation in decision-making. Hatch (1997) posited that participative decision-making facilitates lateral rather than simply top-down communication. L. A. Grunig et al. (2002) noted that such empowerment and symmetrical communication leads to even greater employee satisfaction than more authoritarian organizational cultures and leadership styles.

Beyond the excellence study (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002), scholarship specifically regarding internal public relations (employee communications) theory and practice has been fairly limited, addressing a

broad range of employee communication facets but only scratching the surface in strong theory development. For example, one study (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992) addressed the role of an organization's public relations manager in mediating organizational environments, suggesting that when changeability of publics (including internal or employee publics) increases in an organizational environment, enactment of public relations manager roles increases—but only in proportion to the openness of the dominant coalition to its environment (p. 216). Another study (Wright, 1995) found that although corporate CEO's and public relations "executives" agreed on the importance of employee communications, the public relations function remains largely "journalistic" in its internal communications, focusing on communication content in newsletters and other "products" rather than building relationships with employees; Wright also confirmed the importance of top public relations "executives" reporting directly to the organization's dominant coalition in order to influence needed changes in internal public relations/employee communication. Looking at employee communication from a relationship management paradigm, Jo and Shim (2005) found that "employees receiving positive communication are more likely to be motivated to form trusting relationships with the management level" (p. 278). Similarly, several of my own studies (McCown, 2005a, 2006) found that organizational leaders employing transformational leadership style with individualized consideration strategies enhanced internal public relations excellence, employee communication, relationship-building, and leader-employee trust. I also found that employees perceiving internal communication gaps, particularly in turbulent situations, may become "activist," forcing organizational

leadership to become more symmetrical in communication and take steps to improve internal public relations practices argued.

Finally, two studies (Murgolo-Poore, Pitt, & Ewing, 2002; Murgolo-Poore, Pitt, Berthon, & Prendegast, 2003) examined organizational use of the intranet in employee communications. The first study (Murgolo-Poore et al., 2002) introduced an intranet effectiveness checklist which public relations practitioners may use to test how well an organization's intranet helps to successfully manage organizational operations, culture, and facilitation of members' collaboration, cooperation, and communication. The second study (Murgolo-Poore et al., 2003) used the previously developed scale to predict a positive correlation between effective organizational intranets and intelligence dissemination ("the process and extent of market information exchange within a given organization," p. 175) inside the organization.

#### *Theories of employee communications*

Expanding the literature review to include management, communication management, and marketing/marketing communications perspectives on employee communication, more research applies to this study. The existing literature on employee or internal communication may be categorized into two areas: workplace communication climate and leader-follower (or manager-subordinate) communication.

*Workplace communication climate.* A number of communication, management, and marketing scholars explored internal communication from several angles, examining workplace communication climate as a factor affecting employee communication. For example, Ruppel and Harrington (2000) extended previous



stakeholder research to internal (employee) stakeholders, measuring employee perceptions of “right,” “just,” and “fair” treatment using Victor and Cullen’s (1988) ethical work climate instrument. Results supported that managers who encourage ethical, benevolent workplace climates enhance employee communication as well as increase trust in manager-employee relationships; both of these outcomes positively influence employee perceptions of innovation and organizational commitment. In addition, Smidts, Pruyn, and vanRiel (2001) developed a model linking an organization’s external prestige with employee communication; in particular, an organization’s open, positive communication climate—even more so than its communication content, although keeping employees informed remains important—enhances employee identification with the organization, which, in turn, enhances organizational reputation. Extending their argument further, the authors posited that “managers should therefore pay serious attention to internal communication climate by providing each employee with adequate information and the opportunities to speak out, get involved, be listened to, and actively participate” (p. 1059).

Looking at internal communication needs during restructurings and reorganizations, Young and Post (1993) studied ten U.S. firms and determined that the most “effective managers strategically use communication to manage tough organizational changes” (p. 31). The authors identified eight factors that determine employee communication effectiveness: the chief executive’s commitment to the necessity of employee communication and direct involvement in communication (the most significant factor); consistency between managers’ words and actions regarding employee communication; commitment to two-way communication and dialogue;

emphasis on face-to-face communication between top management and employees; shared—rather than centralized—responsibility for employee communications (spread from top leaders through “local” managers); candor in sharing both bad news and good news; understanding employees as “customers” and serving their communication needs; and understanding employee communications as a process, not as products such as newsletters or slide shows (pp. 34-40).

Several scholars (Asif & Sargeant, 2000; Dolphin, 2005) approached internal communications from a marketing perspective. Using grounded theory, Asif and Sargeant (2000) developed a model that, in essence, calls for cooperative communication processes—both informal and formal—between employees and management/leadership. This model argued for communication processes similar to those proposed by the excellence study’s symmetrical view of public relations (Dozier et al, 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). This internal communication process, Asif and Sargeant (2000) argued, resulted in six key outcomes: sense of shared vision, job/personal satisfaction, service focus, empowerment, organizational commitment, and loyalty (through sustained employment at the organization). Variables moderating the outcomes included communication volume, management style, communication style (ranging from brief to verbose), length of employee service, and employee position. In addition, DeBussy, Ewing, and Pitt (2003) explored the use of intranet technologies with “internal marketing,” developing a model to combine new media with stakeholder/communication theories (again, without references to public relations scholarship on stakeholder theories). Specifically, the authors found that new media

usage—particularly the intranet—has a positive impact on effective internal marketing communications. They also argued that “Internet communication technologies empower employees and contribute to the democratization of the workplace,” spreading power beyond centralized control of employee newsletters and other traditional internal communication channels (p. 157). Finally, Dolphin’s (2005) study found that communication executives (without referring to those executives as public relations practitioners) considered employee communications critical to an organization’s success, and that relationship-building rather than information dissemination was the “key to success in employee relations in the future” (p. 185).

*Leader-follower communication.* In addition to workplace communication climate, scholarship regarding employee communication has focused heavily on communication between leaders, managers, or supervisors and employees. For example, Therkelsen and Fiebich’s (2003) macro review of employee relations literature argues that the majority of studies support two principles: the primacy of the employee public and the critical role of the frontline supervisor in effective employee communication (p. 120).

Several scholars (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1996; Romm, 1999) looked at other aspects of leader communication with employees. Leadership’s internal communication affects follower perceptions of leader charisma and effectiveness based on vision content (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999), organizational performance (Kirkpatrick, 1996), and leader delivery of the vision (Romm, 1999), the latter weighing most heavily on follower perceptions. Through employee communication, leaders create shared vision of organizational goals (Cameron &

McCollum, 1993; Fairhurst, 1993; Farmer et al., 1998; Haas, B. D. Sypher, & H. E. Sypher, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Also, employees' constrained direct access to upper-level leaders forces trickle-down of most vision communication through organized communication campaigns, leaving middle- and lower-level leaders responsible for daily vision implementation and sustenance (Fairhurst, 1993). Rather than through publications, which use one-way communication, leaders may enhance management-employee relationships more effectively through two-way interpersonal communication channels such as team meetings, group problem-solving sessions, and supervisor briefings (Cameron & McCollum, 1993). In addition, Pincus et al. (1991) found that despite strongly held beliefs about internal communication activities' value and impact, CEOs displayed mixed feelings about program effectiveness and their own limited direct communication with employees below middle-management level.

Other scholars (Kim, 2002; Sagie, 1996; Sobo & Sadler, 2002) examined more specifically how managers/leaders communicate with employees to enhance participative decision-making. For example, Kim (2002) studied participative management in public agencies, finding that when managers use participative management styles and work to improve communication and when employees perceive their understanding of organizational goals/vision and involvement in strategic planning as high, employee job satisfaction increases (p. 234-235); based on these results, the author suggested that public sector leaders consider changing their organizational culture and leadership style from hierarchical and vertical to one of more participative, empowered planning and decision-making. Similarly, Sobo and Sadler (2002) studied leader-employee communication in a health-care setting,

determining that a leader-initiated “Employee Leadership Council” facilitating employee input through “innovative ideas” and “constructive expression of dissatisfaction” improved employee morale. Specifically, because of communication initiatives, employee perceptions of the organization’s commitment to employees, open and honest communication channels, leadership value of employee input, employee trust in leadership’s decision-making, and organizational loyalty (i.e., the organization is a “good place to work”) all increased dramatically in just one year. Finally, Sagie (1996) studied the influence of leader communication style and participative goal setting on employee performance and attitudes. Generally, employee teams with highly directive leaders performed better, but those with participative goal-setting strategies had improved attitudes (including, i.e., commitment to the goal and work satisfaction); thus, a combination of high directiveness in communication with “autonomy, innovation, and full involvement of employees in goal setting and decision making” may prove most fruitful in meeting organizational goals (p. 61).

### Relationship Management

Ferguson (1984) first suggested relationship management as a public relations paradigm shift more than two decades ago. Building on her scholarship as well as others’ research, (i.e., Ehling, 1992; J. E. Grunig, 1992), Ledingham and Bruning (2000a) noted a shift in public relations, moving from manipulation and persuasion to a relationship-building focus. Recently, Flynn (2006) advocated a multi-dimensional perspective of public relations that seeks to balance dialogue, collaboration, and

negotiation between organizations and their publics—brought about through management of communication in relationship building.

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997, 2000) first constructed a theoretical model for relationship management, highlighting several key steps, including identifying the antecedents, states, and consequences of organization-publics relationships. Further studies identified dimensions of “good” organization-publics relationships—trust, openness, involvement, commitment, and investment (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998); developed a scale for measuring the effect of and long-term changes in organization-publics relationship perceptions (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999); underscored the importance of strategic public perceptions and two-way symmetrical public relations practices in bringing mutual benefit to both publics and the organization (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000b); and supported the idea that public relations adds value to an organization through relationship management occurring continuously over time (Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999).

#### *Measuring organization-publics relationships*

Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) developed guidelines for measuring organization-publics relationships through six key characteristics: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship (p. 3); in addition, they noted that these indicators are critical for building effective relationships with publics—including internal (employee) publics. Likewise, building on previous public relations theory, J. E. Grunig and Huang (2000) recognized the need to identify “strategic constituencies” for relationship building, noting the

importance of measuring these characteristics in internal as well as external constituencies (p. 31).

More recently, scholars have begun testing and applying relationship management theories in a variety of settings and organizations. (For a synopsis of organization-public relationship research published between 1985 and 2004, see Ki & Shin, 2006.) For example, Ledingham (2001) extended relational theory into government-citizen relationships, arguing that public relations contributed to community building and underscoring the need for evaluation of relationship-building efforts; of particular note, Ledingham pointed to identification of commonalities between organizations and publics as key to strengthening relationships as well as to the mutual benefits afforded to both parties through effectively managing relationships long-term. Turning to the university setting, Bruning (2002) examined relationship building as a student retention strategy, finding significant links between relationship attitudes and overall student satisfaction with the institution. Bruning and Galloway (2003) expanded the scope of Bruning and Ledingham's (1999) relational scale to include two dimensions of personal relationship commitment, personal and structural; findings suggested that these dimensions provide a more complete understanding of organization-publics relationships. Also using Bruning and Galloway's (2003) scale, two studies further linked satisfaction in organization-public relationships with behavioral intent. In the first study, Bruning, Castle, and Schrepfer (2004) tested relational satisfaction between customers and an electric company; the second study (Bruning, Langenhop, & Green, 2004) examined city-resident relationships through evaluation housing and city service satisfaction, showing that

the city's relationship-building can positively affect resident attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors.

Other relationship management studies offer further insights into the benefits of effective organization-publics relationships. First, Ni (2006) combined management literature's resource-based view with relationship building strategies to discover several key characteristics of relationships offering competitive advantages; these include the ideas that strong relationships were valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and hard to be substituted, and that such strong relationships contribute to organizational strategy implementation. Second, Hall (2006) adapted Hon and J. E. Grunig's (1999) relationship measurement guidelines to measure trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction, and added two other factors—communal relationship types and exchange relationship types—to explore the impact of corporate philanthropy and corporate community relations programs on company-customer relationships. Her results demonstrated links between the programs, customer awareness of them, and communal types of relationships. In addition, Scott's (2007) chapter on applying relationship measures to public relations practice offered insights into using relational measures developed and tested by scholars in actual business settings for real clients. She highlighted valuable outcomes of using such instruments including improving access to and gaining positive attention from organizations' dominant coalitions, increased opportunities for practitioners to be seen as crucial for effective company management, increased transparency of the connections between building effective public relationships with achieving



organizational goals (particularly the bottom line), and the critical importance of trust in the organization-publics relationship.

### Public Relations Power

Understanding the literature in leadership first requires an understanding of power itself. As Berger and Reber (2006) noted, power and influence share some similarities. Citing a host of scholars (Barbalet, 1985; Cobb, 1984; Greiner & Schein, 1988; L. A. Grunig, 1992; Hay & Hartel, 2000; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992), Berger and Reber summarized that “power is often described as a capacity or something possessed that allows one to get things done or get others to do what you want them to do” (p. 3). Relatedly, Berger and Reber (citing Kanter, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983) stated that influence “is the use of power to get things done, or to accomplish something, for some purpose in organizations” (p. 4). Integrating these definitions, Berger and Reber arrived at the following definition of power and influence: “the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of others” (p. 5).

Building on these conceptualizations of power, the power-control perspective (Berger, 2005; Dozier & L. A. Grunig, 1992) provides important understanding prior to exploring research in leadership. This perspective suggests that leaders will set up organizational structures that satisfice—that are good enough—and then beyond that make decisions based on their own interests in power and control. In fact, L. A. Grunig (1992) determined that an organization’s public relations practices are the way they are “because the people who have power in an organization choose that behavior” (p. 23). Further, the excellence study (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) posited

that public relations practitioners must have power in the organization's dominant coalition, or organizational decision-making body, in order to best influence the organization's worldview of public relations, and to help set goals and identify strategic publics.

Recent studies (Berger, 2005; Berger, 2007; Berger & Reber, 2006) focus further on power/influence in public relations; in particular, Berger and Reber (2006) highlight that public relations professionals, academics, and graduate students named power, or "gaining a seat at the decision-making table" either the first or second most important issue in public relations (p. 5). However, Berger (2007) noted that public relations practitioner involvement in or with the dominant coalition does not necessarily guarantee influence, and could even risk "co-optation of professional voice and values" (Holtzhausen, 2000; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002). Addressing this power imbalance, Berger and Reber (2006), along with others (i.e., Holtzhausen, 2000, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Lauzen, 1992), argued that public relations practitioners can and should hold organizational power, regardless of empowerment level, access to the dominant coalition, or seats at the organizational decision-making table. Indeed, these scholars suggested that in order to give voice to less powerful publics (Karlberg, 1996), public relations practitioners have a responsibility to take opportunities to resist usual power structures through a variety of means including dissensus and activism (Holtzhausen, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) as well as through alpha approaches ("commonly used influence tactics that are generally sanctioned or accepted in professional and organizational practice," Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 107) and more controversial omega tactics (that "reflect organizational

politics that ‘play outside the rules’ and represent forms of illegitimate authority,” Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 152). Through resistance strategies, public relations practitioners can gain power and influence for accomplishing organizational goals (Hay & Hartel, 2000) or to prompt or force organizational changes necessary to address shortcomings (Mintzberg, 1983). Berger (2005, 2007) also notes that power may exist in multiple coalitions throughout an organization; thus not only public relations practitioners working through resistance strategies but also other employees or employee groups may rise as leaders to influence organizational decisions.

Although resistance strategies hold promise both for future public relations research as well as increased power and influence for practitioners, organizational decisions continue to emerge largely through dominant coalition discussions and actions. Plowman’s (1998) study on conflict in power for public relations found that “top management has a major effect on the practice of public relations,” and that the dominant coalition’s preferences dictate the organization’s public relations worldview (p. 257-258). In addition, O’Neil (2003) found connections between perceived value of public relations and the relationships between practitioners and the dominant coalition. The study also yielded positive associations between practitioners’ reporting relationships with the dominant coalition and organizational influence; this contrasts with only weak associations between reporting relationships and organizational influence in excellence study follow-ups (Dozier et al., 1995). Likewise, Berger (2007) argued that public relations practitioners with dominant coalition membership or access have “important advantages,” including granted, formal authority; “regular access to key decision makers and to more strategic

information for use”; and “opportunities to speak, advocate, debate, resist, and actively participate in strategic decision making” (p. 224). Clearly, these studies show that access to or membership in the dominant coalition is crucial for practitioners to hold power and influence within their organizations. Yet according to Berger (2007), the majority of public relations professionals today still find themselves outside of this inner decision-making circle. These considerations prompt research into better understanding leadership types and how they influence excellence (or lack thereof) in public relations practices, both internal and external.

Although J. E. Grunig and associates (1992) have posited that authoritarian leadership is not conducive to excellent public relations, relatively little research within the public relations body of knowledge has further explored which types of leadership styles most effectively contribute to an organization’s public relations excellence. One study (Aldoory & Toth, 2004) looked at practitioner perceptions of public relations leadership styles—particularly with regard to gender, finding strong preference for transformational style combined with employment of situational (a combination of transformational and transactional) style in more turbulent times. The study also found no style preference difference between male and female respondents, but did find that female public relations leaders placed higher value on building rapport and personal connections with employees, sharing decision-making power, and good communication and listening, among other things (p. 175). In addition, the authors argued that “due to the connections between transformational leadership and feminine traits, women may be more suited to be public relations leaders” (p. 179). Studies I conducted (McCown, 2005a, 2006) explored connections between internal

public relations practices and leadership. I found strong connections between transformational leadership style and internal public relations excellence.

### Leadership Styles

#### *Transformational/charismatic leadership style*

According to Bass (1985, 1990a), early leadership research focused mostly on the differences between autocratic and democratic approaches, decision-making with regard to participation or direction, the task- or relationship-focus of leading people, and whether leadership included initiation or consideration. Simultaneously, scholars explored how to promote change in people as individuals, in groups, and in the context of organizations, calling for “democratic, participative, relationship-oriented, considerate leadership” (Bass, 1985, p. 3).

One emerging leadership style theory explored the transformational leader who, according to Burns (1978), recognizes that followers (or employees) have needs that go beyond transactional exchanges. Bass (1985) posited that in contemporary affluent societies, transformational leaders should find significant opportunities for arousing higher level needs (Maslow, 1954), since most lower level needs would be highly satisfied. But he noted that even in societies where existence needs are highly unsatisfied (third world countries, for example), some leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, have still been able to arouse higher-level needs in their followers, even at the expense of sacrificing basic need satisfaction. Bass argued that such leaders, transformational in their way of leading, “can move those influenced to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group, organization, or country” (p. 15).

Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) took fundamental differences in their approaches to understanding transformational leadership. Although Burns saw Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs as critical to the process of transformation, Bass argued that transformation may occur in shifting upward or downward, as in a leader influencing a group of teens to move from law-abiding behavior to criminal behavior in order to more fully "satisfy" lower level needs. With regard to work settings, however, Burns and Bass suggested that transformational leaders are usually more concerned with motivating workers toward higher-level needs, enabling workers to take more initiative and responsibility, potentially converting them into leaders. Following up on this idea, Bandura's (1982) research argued for workers to become self-regulating under transformational leadership, which provided the high performance standards and inspiration required to reach goals. Ultimately, "transformational leadership is closer to the prototype of leadership that people have in mind when they describe their ideal leader and is more likely to provide a role model with which subordinates want to identify" (Bass, 1990a). In addition, Bass (1990b) argued that transactional leaders can and should be trained to become more transformational in order to better empower employees and reap the performance benefits associated with transformational leadership (p. 25).

Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a host of scholars—heavily influenced by Weber's (1947) leadership research—extended transformational theories into the realm of charisma, Greek for "divinely inspired gift." For Weber, the term describes leader influence based on follower perceptions of extraordinary leader qualities (often presented during a change or a crisis) rather than on formal or positional authority.

In recent leadership research, some scholars used the terms charismatic and transformational interchangeably (Beyer, 1999a, 1999b; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; House, 1977; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Conger (1989) and Conger and Kanungo (1998) refined follower-attribution theories, suggesting that charismatic leadership is attributed to the leader by the follower(s), as determined by leader behavior and skill as well as the situation in which he or she is leading. Later, Yukl (2002) summarized leader behaviors that most often evoke follower attribution of leader charisma, though not all had to be present to the same degree nor are they equally important in every situation. These include leaders who advocate a vision that transcends the status quo but that is not seen as too “radical” by the followers; unconventional behavior in order to accomplish the vision; willingness to self-sacrifice or risk personally for the vision; confidence in the vision; and those who use persuasive or “visioning” appeals rather than authority or participative decision-making processes.

Conger (1989) further extended the theory to suggest that followers’ degree of commitment to a charismatic leader’s vision is tied to personal identification, where followers idolize the leader due to perceived extraordinary characteristics. The degree of the idolization also depended, Conger said, on the extent to which followers internalize the leader’s vision, particularly his or her values and beliefs.

Situation or contingency theory also plays a role in charismatic and transformational leadership. In an extensive literature review, Yukl and Howell (1999) proposed that although charismatic leadership may be applied in the majority of organizational situations, it might be more effective in some situations than others.

In particular, they argued that it is more likely to be present/successful in environmental circumstances such as crises, instability, high demand, and opportunity for change; organic organizational structures; and adaptive organizational cultures. These conditions are not necessary for effective charismatic leadership, but they potentially increase the opportunity for it. In contrast, Conger and Kanungo (1998) suggested that charismatic leadership may be employed in non-crisis situations. By stirring up dissatisfaction with the status quo and offering a vision with unconventional solutions to a more satisfying future, charismatic leaders may actually evoke conflict and gain support for their vision through influencing followers.

Summarizing earlier research (House, 1977; Shamir et al., 1993), Yukl (2002) suggested exploring relationships between leaders and followers to further understand follower attribution and imitation of charismatic leadership. Yukl suggested nine behaviors that explain the ways in which a charismatic leader sways follower attitudes and behaviors:

- (1) articulating an appealing vision, (2) using strong, expressive forms of communication when articulating the vision, (3) taking personal risks and making self-sacrifices to attain the vision, (4) communicating high expectations, (5) expressing confidence in followers, (6) role modeling of behaviors consistent with the vision, (7) managing follower impressions of the leader, (8) building identification with the group or organization, and (9) empowering followers. (p. 244)

In addition, charismatic leaders influence their followers by promoting social identification (employing slogans, symbols, rituals, ceremonies, or storytelling),



internalization, augmentation of individual and collective self-efficacy (followers' belief in their own and their groups' or teams' ability to achieve organizational goals and objectives), and celebrating accomplishment of organizational objectives (Yukl, 2002); these encourage employees to develop organizational loyalty and pride, making meaning of their work through contributions to the organization's greater goals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In personal identification theory (Conger, 1989; Yukl, 2002), follower perceptions of extraordinary characteristics produce leader idolization proportional to followers' internalization of leader vision, values, and beliefs; previously shared vision and values, and leader linkage of vision and values with tasks to achieve organizational goals increases internalization.

Employing individualized consideration (IC) strategies, transformational leaders exhibit friendly and close behavior, treat followers as equals, and offer support/encouragement according to followers' individual needs (Bass, 1985). Musser (1997) summarized leadership concepts as post-heroic (Huey, 1994), credible (Kouzes & Posner, 1993), stewardship (Block, 1993), principle-centered (Covey, 1992), and compassionate and servant (DePree, 1989; Greenleaf, 1977). Leaders using IC draw from ethical value systems that include other-oriented end goals and high need sensitivity (Musser & Orke, 1992) to "produce a humane, compassionate view of followers" and freedom from hierarchical control leading to follower empowerment (Musser, 1997, p. 3). Musser also found a causal relationship between a leader's religious conversion and follower perception of that leader's individualized consideration behavior. Numerous scholars have further tested aspects of transformational leadership in the organizational context. Findings included increased

effectiveness and job satisfaction among subordinates in the presence of transformational leadership (Seltzer & Bass, 1990); positive links between transformational leadership, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Walumbwa et al., 2004); a connection between transformational leadership and effective organizational goal dissemination (Berson & Avolio, 2004); a positive relationship between employee work group self-efficacy and cohesiveness (brought about by transformational leadership) and high work performance (Pillai & Williams, 2004); connections between transformational leadership and employee empowerment and dependency (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003); stronger transformational leader-follower relationships in situations perceiving high-quality leader-member exchanges (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006); and refinements in understanding transformational leadership's individualized consideration by distinguishing between the effects of developmental leadership (encouraging employee growth and development) and supportive leadership (expressing concern for and taking account of followers' needs and preferences in decision-making), with developmental leadership resulting in stronger correlations with job satisfaction, career certainty, affective organizational commitment, and self-efficacy in role-breadth (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006).

#### *Principle-centered leadership style*

Although limited literature exists exploring the principle-centered leadership style (Covey, 1992), the tenets of this style align closely with this dissertation study's leadership characteristics, thus requiring inclusion in the literature review. In the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of scholars and business gurus gave

heightened attention to the importance of ethics, character, and principles in organizational leadership. Covey (1992) identified eight characteristics of “principle-centered leaders”: continual learners, service oriented (seeing life as a “mission”), radiators of positive energy, believers in the potential and good in other people, balancers of all aspects of life (including the ability to allow themselves and others to make mistakes and the need for self-honesty), adventurers (particularly with regard to “rediscovering” people with each new interaction), synergistic (having the ability to bring together others for improvement), and exercisers of self-renewal (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual (pp. 33-39). Covey saw employee empowerment and trust as critical for creating principle-centered workplaces, suggesting that these keys enable employees to meet expectations “without being reminded” because leaders have “built an emotional bank account with them” (p. 155).

#### *Servant-leadership style*

One leader type “serves” its subordinates. First attributed in scholarship to Greenleaf (1998, original essay in 1970), servant-leadership may be defined as follows:

The servant-leader is a servant first. . . . Becoming a servant leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is a leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.” (pp. 18-19)

Servant leadership assumes that societal change will only emerge through “producing” enough people who are equipped to make that change, and that requires serving others (p. 19-20). In the corporate world, Greenleaf (1977, 1978) posited that the primary purpose of a business should be to create a positive impact on its employees and the greater community; servant-leadership brings together service and meaning in the workplace.

Building on Greenleaf, a number of scholars and business leaders have researched servant leadership. DePree (1989) determined that servant-leaders often employ participative management, creating “covenantal relationships” with employees to meet their needs for finding meaning in work; this elevates the goal of “redemption” above the goal of profit in the workplace (DePree in Lee & Zemke, 1995, pp. 101-102). DePree (1992) also suggested 12 keys to successful servant-leadership: integrity, vulnerability, discernment, awareness of the human spirit, courage in relationships, sense of humor, intellectual energy and curiosity, respect for future/regard for present/understanding of past, predictability, breadth, comfort with ambiguity, and presence.

As noted by Lee and Zemke (1995), Block (1993) further argued for servant-leadership as stewardship, defined by accountability through service rather than control or compliance. In addition, Spears (1998) summarized servant leadership traits espoused by Greenleaf and others as follows: listening; empathy; healing (taking opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact); persuasion through convincing and consensus rather than coercion; awareness of self, others, and environment; conceptualization (dreaming dreams); foresight

(understanding past/present/future); stewardship (commitment to serving needs of others first); commitment to the growth of people; and building community among employees (pp. 4-7).

Business leaders such as the Toro company's Melrose (1995) and Tom's of Maine's Chappell (1993) wrote extensively about applying servant-leadership principles in their organizations. Melrose promoted creating organizational culture that facilitates employees reaching their potential; a trusting environment (that leads to risk-taking, innovation, and creativity); individual and team empowerment for better problem-solving; increased self-worth resulting in greater productivity; and valuing employees, customers, and performance to lead to quality, productivity, and profits. Melrose argued for people values—trust and respect for one another, teamwork and win-win partnerships, giving power away, coaching and serving, overtly recognizing small successes and good tries, and open clear communication—based on the guiding principle of genuinely valuing others out of respect and care for their well-being (p. 38-39). Melrose also proposed that this type of corporate culture allows for leader mistakes because they have the support of their employees; in fact, because they “enhance your humanness,” leader imperfections may actually foster greater employee risk-taking, innovation, and trust (p. 130). Finally, Melrose noted the New Testament example of Jesus as the ideal servant-leader, quoting, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant,” cited in Matthew 20:26 (p. 123). Similarly, Chappell suggested that businesses must have a “soul” brought about by servant-leadership (p. ix). He argued for humility and accountability as critical leadership traits, and highlighted the importance of allowing beliefs to drive creative

business strategy, inspiring employees to embody the corporate mission in their professional and personal lives, creating a corporate community, and promoting creativity and autonomy. Chappell touted trust relationships as fostering autonomy to bring both freedom and responsibility to help others.

Recently, Fry (2003) offered a spiritual leadership model similar to that of servant-leadership. The model incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival. Spiritual leadership creates vision and value congruence across the strategic, empowered team, and individual levels, and, ultimately, fosters higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity.

#### *Authentic leadership*

Most recently, leadership scholars have begun focusing their attention on understanding the shared root construct of these previously reviewed leadership styles (transformational, charismatic, principled, and servant) (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This research, brought about in part to better understand developing leadership in a business world full of increased uncertainty (due to ethical crises, recent heightened terrorism, and natural disasters), is summarized by George (2003), former head of Medtronic: “We need leaders who lead with purpose, values, and integrity; leaders who build enduring organizations, motivate their employees to provide superior customer service, and create long-term value for shareholders” (p. 9). As a result, a theory of authentic leadership development, or ALD (Luthans & Avolio, 2003), has emerged, holding promise both for expanding leadership theory as well as for providing a potential framework for the current study.

The basis of authentic leadership—“authenticity”—finds its roots in Greek philosophy, and centers on the adage, “To thine own self be true” (as noted in Avolio & Gardner, 2005; see Erickson, 1995, and Harter, 2002, for fuller reviews of authenticity in philosophy and psychology). Used in this emerging body of leadership literature, authenticity is understood as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to ‘know oneself,’” and “implies that one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” (Harter, 2002, p. 382). Building on Goffman (1963), Avolio and Gardner (2005) suggested that this sense of authentic self develops through social exchanges; they noted that authenticity in social exchanges occurs in degrees or levels as individuals maintain or violate their commitments to others, as discussed by Erikson (1995).

Scholars have defined authentic leadership in similar ways, with some important distinctions. Terry (1993, pp. 223-229) argued that authentic leaders are those who “take authentic action” and who meet seven criteria: correspondence (between ideas and behaviors), consistency (between “talk” and “walk”), coherence (connecting one consistent action to another), concealment (or actually, recognizing and addressing potential concealment of ambiguities and contradictions of actions), conveyance (of the action’s mission), comprehensiveness (which allows for added insights, “embraces differences,” and “opens dialogues”), and convergence (which connects individuals into a transcendent, mutual understanding). More recent research indicated that authentic leaders may be “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’

values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (Avolio, Luthans, & Walumbwa, 2004, p. 4, as cited in Avolio, Gardner et al., 2004). Authentic leadership may also be “a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243). Moreover, Luthans and Avolio suggested that “the authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, moral/ethical, future-oriented, and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders. The authentic leader is true to him/herself and the exhibited behavior positively transforms or develops associates into leaders themselves” (2003, p. 243).

Other scholars have expressed concern with these definitions’ multidimensionality (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005), noting that Luthans and Avolio’s (2003) intentional breadth makes the construct difficult to measure. Shamir and Eilam (2005) addressed the construct’s problematic breadth by narrowing their definition of authentic leadership to four defining characteristics:

1. “Authentic leaders do not fake their leadership.”
2. “Authentic leaders do not take on a leadership role or engage in leadership activities for status, honor or other personal rewards.”
3. “Authentic leaders are originals, not copies,” coming to their convictions—though they may be shared with others—through their own experiential process and internalization.



4. “Authentic leaders are leaders whose actions are based on their values and convictions. What they say is consistent with what they believe, and their actions are consistent with both their talk and their beliefs” (pp. 396-397).

Shamir and Eilam (2005) added that authentic leaders have the following attributes: the leadership role as central to their self-concept, a high level of self-resolution or self-concept clarity; self-concordant (“owned”) goals; and self-expressive behavior (pp. 398-399). Avolio and Gardner (2005) noted that Shamir and Eilam’s (2005) characteristics do not focus on leadership style or “content of the leader’s values or convictions” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 321), which differs from the view that authentic leaders’ values and convictions grow out of a positive moral perspective (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003). Likewise, Michie and Gooty (2005) argued that “self-transcendent values and positive other-directed emotions are important determinants of authentic leadership” (p. 441).

Several scholars (Gardner et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005) proposed that authentic leaders facilitate development of authentic followership, or “followers who follow the leader for authentic reasons. . . because they share the leader’s beliefs, values and convictions, the leader’s concerns, and the leader’s definition of the situation” (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 401). Authentic followers also have a realistic perspective of the leader, without “illusions or delusions” or “blind” following; rather, they “authenticate” the leader based on consistency between leader behaviors and held beliefs, values, and convictions (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 401). Likewise, Gardner et al. (2005) noted authentic followership reflects authentic leader

development, displaying many of the same antecedents as previously described for authentic leaders. In particular, relationships with an authentic leader may serve as a “trigger event” for the follower’s authentic development, leading toward increased self-awareness (p. 360). In addition, Gardner et al. posited that for those followers with high self-concept clarity, congruence between followers’ values and leaders’ values increased “identification with and emulation of” the leader (p. 360). Followers with low self-concept clarity may be attracted to authentic leaders and choose to adopt leader values as their own; however, Gardner et al. argued that authentic leaders’ positive modeling fosters those followers’ self-concept clarification, resulting in eventual internalization of the organization’s core values and more fully developed follower authenticity (p. 360). Ultimately, authentic leadership—through demonstrating the self-awareness development process and through encouraging follower personal growth—leads to greater follower authenticity and increased leader-follower intimacy and trust, increased follower (employee) engagement, and “workplace wellbeing” that contributes to greater workplace performance (p. 360-367).

Similarly, Gardner and Schermerhorn (2004) noted the powerful combination of authentic leaders’ self-awareness, self-regulation, positive psychological capabilities (confidence, hope, optimism, resilience), and commitment to growth/development (in themselves and followers). The authors cited Joanne DeLavan Reichardt, Randstad North America’s vice president of corporate communications and public affairs, who stated that authentic leadership offer a two-

fold return on investment: visible management commitment to open, honest communication and employee partnership to influence business results.

Avolio and Gardner (2005) compared ALD theory with transformational, charismatic, servant, and spiritual leadership theories. First, a leader may be authentic but not transformational; however, by definition according to Bass (1985) and Burns (1978), a transformational leader must be authentic. “Authentic leaders are anchored by their own deep sense of self; they know where they stand on important issues, values, and beliefs” (p. 329). Second, despite their potential for positive impact through role modeling, authentic leaders may not intend to actively develop their followers into leaders, a defining characteristic of transformational leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Third, authentic leaders recognize their own weaknesses and work to address them through “capable followers” and “positive organizational context” (p. 330). Comparing authentic and charismatic leadership, Avolio and Gardner (2005) noted charismatic leaders influence follower self-awareness of values/moral perspectives through rhetoric. In contrast, authentic leaders “energize followers by creating meaning and positively socially constructing reality for themselves and followers” (p. 330). Finally, Avolio and Gardner (2005) compared authentic leadership with servant and spiritual leadership, suggesting that both recognize the importance of leader self-awareness and self-regulation as well as emphasis on leader awareness, empathy, conceptualization, vision, and focus on integrity, trust, courage, hope and perseverance or resilience. However, Avolio and Gardner (2005) argued that servant and spiritual leadership theories lack either empirical support or testing in the organizational context, whereas authentic leadership theories draw from related

literature in clinical, positive, and social psychology, and are undergoing empirical testing within organizational contexts.

### Organizational Culture

Hundreds of scholars—from anthropologists to management researchers—have developed definitions for culture (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). In particular, Hofstede (1980) broadly defined culture as “the collective mental programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. . . . Culture is to human collectivity what personality is to an individual” (p. 21). However, this dissertation study focuses in on a specific aspect of culture, that of culture within an organization.

#### *Theories of organizational culture*

Organizational culture may be likened to organizational “personality,” or those behaviors and norms that distinguish one organization from another. Building on previous scholars, Schein (1985) developed a formal definition of organizational culture, which included regularly observed behavioral patterns (Goffman, 1959, 1967; Van Maanen, 1979), norms (Homans, 1950), overarching values espoused by the organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982); the philosophies that guide employee and customer policies (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981); and the feeling or climate of the organization as manifested through its physical facilities and human interactions (Tagiuri & Litwin, 1968). In essence, Schein suggested that organizational culture is a set of assumptions developed through group consensus and shared experiences, and “valid” enough to teach new group members (p. 9). Key elements include consensual mission statement and shared purposes or “reasons to be”—both economic and

esoteric (p. 53). Schein also contended that religion often provides a context for organizational members to understand difficult or “‘unexplainable’ situations and ‘provides guidelines for what to do in ambiguous, uncertain, and threatening situations’” (p. 79). In short, organizational culture allows members to work together comfortably and focus on their jobs.

If internal issues are not settled, if people are preoccupied with their position and identity, if they are insecure, if they do not know the rules of the game and therefore cannot predict or understand what is going on, they cannot concentrate on the important survival issues that may face the organization. (Schein, 1985, p. 83)

Without well-identified organizational culture, Schein posited, members—and, ultimately, the organization—would be less effective. In addition, he purported that organizational cultures imply long-range stability, emphasize shared concepts, and suggest agreement among all—or at least most—employees (p. 247).

Relatedly, Denison (1990) proposed four key ideas germane to organizational culture that integrate to make organizations effective: involvement (employee self-management and participation create ownership and responsibility), consistency (shared belief and values systems have positive impact on employee consensus and accomplishments), adaptability (organizations are able to perceive and respond to both internal and external environments), and mission (shared definition of the function and purpose of an organization and its members). According to Denison, organizational cultures that integrate and balance these four characteristics provide organizations with purpose, meaning, and clear direction and goals (p. 15).

In a similar fashion, Kotter and Heskett (1992) defined organizational culture as a combination of shared values and group behaviors. Their research suggested that organizational culture usually begins to emerge as top management shares a vision or philosophy for the organization. As employees begin adapting their behavior according to this philosophy, success results and an identifiable organizational culture develops. In several studies, Kotter and Heskett found that corporate culture can have significant impact on a firm's long-term economic performance, concluding that this influence is likely to increase in the future. In addition, despite their resistance to change (cultures seem to become entities in themselves), corporate cultures can be altered to enhance performance (pp. 10-12). Other findings include association of "strong cultures" with excellent performance, the importance of goal alignment among organizational members, the positive motivational effect of strong cultures on employees, and the idea that strong cultures "provide needed structure and controls without having to rely on a stifling, formal bureaucracy that can dampen motivation and innovation" (pp. 15-16).

#### *Workplace spirituality*

In recent years, scholars have begun examining the phenomenon of workplace spirituality as part of organizational culture. This has proven somewhat challenging because, as McCormick (1994) pointed out, spirituality itself is difficult to understand and pinpoint due to numerous definitions and spiritual/religious traditions. He sought to identify themes of spiritual workplaces without regard for specific spiritual traditions, suggesting these commonalities: compassion, right livelihood (the Buddhist concept of choosing work that does not cause people or animals to suffer);

selfless service (drawn from Christianity and Hinduism); work as meditative; and pluralism, which, as McCormick noted, becomes problematic when “creating a community of like-minded spiritual colleagues at work can endanger an employee’s right to religious freedom” (p. 7).

Attempting to define workplace spirituality, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) offered the following: “A framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy” (p. 13). They especially noted that employees in spiritual workplaces often exhibit a sense of vocational calling and a need for social connection or membership.

Because this dissertation study focused on an organization whose founder/top leader’s religious tradition stems from evangelical Christianity, and because the foundational values of the chosen organization’s mission and operation also draw from the same religious tradition, several relevant studies require review. Conley and Wagner-Marsh (1998) proposed that spirituality and ethics in the workplace complement each other; as a result, the current “workplace spirituality movement” could prove synergistic when combined with concern for ethical performance in the workplace (p. 255). They also suggested that leaders who encourage a more widespread commitment to the organizational philosophy’s spiritual foundations could enhance acceptance and practice of ethical behavioral codes. This, in turn, might lead employees beyond mere conformity to ethical codes and into internalization (p. 257). Further, these scholars posited what they call the “fourth

wave” theory of the spiritually-based firm. Building upon Toffler’s (1980) idea of the technological firm as an organizational “third wave,” they proposed six key concepts critical for achieving a spiritually based organizational culture (the “fourth wave”): “honesty with self [in the organizational leader], articulation of the corporation’s spiritually-based philosophy, mutual trust and honesty with others, commitment to quality and service, commitment to employees, and selection of personnel to match the corporation’s spiritually-based philosophy” (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999, p. 292).

Studying how organizations may most effectively maintain workplace spirituality, Konz and Ryan (1999) suggested that defining spirituality in the organization’s written mission statement—as the enunciation of organizational culture—is critical to help potential employees determine if personal spirituality fits with an organization’s spirituality. This close meshing, the scholars posited, plays a critical role in avoiding employee confusion and frustration.

Finally, in a review of existing workplace spirituality scholarship, Garcia-Zamor (2003) cited Harvard Business School and Vanderbilt University Business School studies that found organizations with strong corporate cultures—spirited workplaces—correlated positively with profitability; as employees attempted to connect their personal moral values stemming from their religious and cultural values with workplace ethics, their on-the-job performance increased. The researcher suggested that organizational leaders must realize the need to focus on individuals and establish themselves as “organizations with a higher sense of business purpose” (p. 361).



*Leadership in organizational culture*

Organizational leaders and corporate culture work interrelatedly. Schein (1985) offered several suggestions for the role of leaders in establishing and maintaining organizational culture. First, he posited that because the organization was a founder's original idea, the founder exerts profound influence on the culture and how to make it work. Key traits in leader influence on organizational culture include leader self-confidence and determination; strong assumptions about the nature of the world; the role the organization plays in the world, the link between human nature and relationships; how to determine "truth"; and how to manage time and space (p. 210). Quoting Bennis (1983), Schein cited the need for organizational leaders to "articulate a vision" for the group in order to "embed" organizational culture in members (p. 223). Specific facets include what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control; their reactions to critical events and crises; deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching; setting criteria for rewards and status elevation; and recruitment, hiring, promotion, retirement, and "excommunication" criteria (pp. 224-225). Of special relevance to this dissertation study, leaders most effective in influencing organizational culture understand that their own visible behavior communicates powerfully to employees—especially new hires—regarding cultural philosophies, assumptions, and values (Schein, 1985, p. 232). Likewise, Kotter and Heskett (1992) posited that organizational leaders must communicate corporate visions through "words and deeds" to grow shared values and ensure that firm behavior and practice mesh with corporate culture (p. 106).

### Research Questions

This study's purpose was to explore the influence of leadership on internal public relations and leader-employee relationship building and its outcomes within the context of a spiritually-based workplace. To explore the confluences of these conceptualizations, I posed the following research questions:

*RQ1: What leadership style is exhibited in the organization's top leader (as self-ascribed and as ascribed by organizational employees)?*

Through this research question, I identified the particular leadership style(s) of the organization's top leader as ascribed by both the leader and his followers.

Through pre-study discussions with a management scholar acquaintance who knows and has actually conducted limited research (unpublished) with this organization's leader, I learned that the leader portrays characteristics usually identified with the following leadership styles: transformational (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978); principle-centered (Covey, 1992); spiritual (Greenleaf, 1977, 1978); and authentic (Luthans & Avolio, 1993). My research examined these characteristics to determine leadership style, key to achieving this dissertation's subsequent goals.

*RQ2: How does that particular leadership style influence the organization's workplace culture?*

With this research question, I explored the interplay between a particular leadership style and organizational culture (Schein, 1985). Because the founder/leader of the organization I studied has already publicly identified himself as an evangelical Christian and has described his organizational philosophy as rooted in this particular religious tradition, it was important to understand the resulting workplace culture and

test application of theories regarding the spiritually based firm (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999). Although the excellence theory (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) has proposed that organic workplace culture is most conducive to fostering excellent public relations, no research to date has explored the influence of spirituality in the workplace on public relations excellence.

*RQ3: How does that leadership style influence internal public relations (employee communication) practices?*

This research question builds on the excellence theory's propositions that certain types of leadership style thwart excellent public relations, while others promote excellence (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). Although excellence theory research has explained that authoritarian leadership style is not conducive to two-way symmetrical communication and related outcomes (i.e., participative decision-making, organic culture), it has not specifically identified leadership styles that do promote internal public relations excellence. This question explored the influence of the leadership styles exhibited by the organization's top leader on open, two-way employee communication.

*RQ4: How does the confluence of this particular leadership style, the organization's internal public relations, and workplace culture facilitate leader-employee relationship building? What are the resulting outcomes of leader-employee relationship building?*

As public relations scholarship has experienced a sea change toward a relationship-building model (Heath, 2001; Ledingham, 2003), little research (exceptions include McCown, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007) has been conducted to date

regarding how leadership style and internal public relations practices help facilitate leader-employee relationship building. In particular, this question explored relationship antecedents such as trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999). It also examined employee empowerment and employee leadership emergence within the organization (i.e., Berger, 2005, 2007).

### Chapter Three – Method

In order to address the research questions posed, I conducted a qualitative case study. This chapter reviews the rationale for selecting this particular methodology for this dissertation, highlighting advantages and limitations as well as the procedures I followed in conducting data collection and analysis. I begin by discussing qualitative methodology and the case study approach. I then detail the triangulation of data collection methods I used—long interviews, participant observation, and document analysis—as well as organization choice and access, recruitment and sampling, and the interview protocol. After describing data management and analysis strategies used, I end this chapter by discussing the criteria I used for evaluating the study's validity as well as how I addressed ethical concerns.

#### Qualitative Methodology

In qualitative methodology, the scholar asks exploratory questions about processes, situations, changes, and meaning; in fact, “qualitative design is guided by acts of questioning and dialogue” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This methodology is best applied in research settings characterized by constant change with blurred boundaries (Potter, 1996). Similarly, qualitative research is best suited to topics requiring in-depth understanding, detailed examples, and insights that help explain “how” and “why”—in short, whenever the scholar desires to explore a research problem's broader implications and place it in historical, political, or social contexts (Brannen, 1992; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995).

Various scholars have described hallmarks of qualitative research, including induction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002); “in vivo” settings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles

& Huberman, 1994); thick description (Geertz, 1973; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); and rich, vivid, contextualized accounts with a “ring of truth” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) described in “loving detail” (Lofland, 1971, p. 13). Qualitative research also explores a situation’s “verstehen,” emphasizing ordinary life as it has meaning to the people involved (Potter, 1996, p. 21).

Qualitative research recognizes the researcher as research instrument (Brannen, 1992; McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Potter, 1996); practicing reflexivity or self reflection helps the researcher recognize subjectivity and attempt to minimize potential biases (McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). In addition, qualitative researchers often allow participants partial control in the research process, attempting to understand the meanings their experiences bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Kvale, 1995; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), treating them as “conversation partners” (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), and giving them voice by presenting their words as data (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Wolcott, 1994). In writing up their findings, qualitative researchers balance their own voices with their participants’ multiple, diverse voices (Fine et al., 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), highlighting the complexities and multiple voices present in participants’ lives, situations, and cultures (M. M. Gergen & K. J. Gergen, 2003).

According to Kvale (1995), research methods should match with topics and research questions. As I explored the confluences of leadership style and internal public relations and their potential influence on leader-employee relationship building

and employee leadership development, I was aware that little prior research had tackled these interrelationships. Employing qualitative methods enabled me to glean more in-depth insights into the research setting's complexities and subtleties, particularly from the participants' perspectives. In addition, being in the actual research setting for observations and conducting in-person interviews with participants allowed for increased understanding "from the inside" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). It also encouraged a more iterative research process, as I was able to follow-up with questions prompted by participant responses and carry those new questions into subsequent interviews; this process yielded greater richness and fuller comprehension of the phenomena under study. Thus, qualitative methodology, with its emphasis on induction and exploration, was particularly appropriate for answering this study's research questions.

#### *Case study approach*

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a "case" is a unit of analysis for bounded phenomena which "always occurs in a specified social and physical setting" (p. 25). In addition, Yin (2003) suggested that a case study strategy is highly preferred "when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1); he also argued that case studies are particularly appropriate when the lines between the phenomenon and its context are blurred. Yin detailed three different purposes for conducting case studies—exploration, description, or explanation—and suggested that these purposes may overlap within individual studies.

One criticism of the case study approach highlights its limitation to one unit, reducing the study's breadth and application to other contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Yet some scholars (Wolcott, 1994; Yin, 2003) argued against that criticism. Specifically, Wolcott (1994) cautioned that "more" is not necessarily better, and that depth, rather than scale increases, should be the focus of qualitative research. Rather than improving power and impact through research at multiple sites, Wolcott posited:

Increasing the number of cases serves only to reduce proportionately the attention that can be given to any one of them. . . . The risk in conducting fieldwork at multiple sites is to forgo the opportunity to produce one well contextualized qualitative study in the course of producing an inadequate quantitative one. (p. 182)

Yin (2003) also advocated for the legitimacy of a single case study, notably when the case is extreme or unique, "typical," revelatory, longitudinal, or may be deemed *the* critical case.

To ensure a case study's quality, Yin (2003) proposed meeting several strategic criteria: relying on underlying related theories to guide data collection and analysis, demonstrating attendance to all evidence (gathered via triangulation from multiple evidence sources), addressing the study's most significant aspects, and, perhaps most importantly, testing rival explanations. For Yin, satisfying this final criterion involves thinking about and collecting evidence of other influences that may affect data analysis and findings; other scholars also call for this accounting of discrepancies and complexities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).



A qualitative case study approach was particularly appropriate for my dissertation research for several reasons. First, my research revolved around “how” and “why” questions, and matched Yin’s (2003) exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes. Second, this study was situated in a specific social and physical setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994), a setting which renders the boundaries of the phenomena and the context blurred (Yin, 2003). In addition, my research questions sought to understand the interplay of several contemporary phenomena (Yin, 2003). Finally, the lack of previous research bringing together the areas I explored suggested that my case could, indeed, turn out to be revelatory, and perhaps even unique or extreme (Yin, 2003). In fact, I believe this was the case, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate.

### Data Collection Methods

For this case study, I used a three-pronged approach to data collection: long interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Each method has strengths and weaknesses; scholars assert that triangulating a variety of collection methods increases a study’s validity, ensuring greater descriptive and explanatory accuracy (Brannen, 1992; Kvale, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Potter, 1996; Yin, 2003).

#### *Long interviews*

According to McCracken (1988), the long interview is a “happy” revision of the ethnographic approach, better protecting participant privacy and allowing for more manageable time requirements (p. 11). H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (1995) viewed long interviews as a “conversation partnership” between researcher and

participant (pp. 10-12). Through a cooperative interview experience, researchers attempt to hear meaning in their participants' words; empowered participants, on the other hand, are given voice and actively engage in helping to shape the conversation. Most importantly, researchers must allow participants the freedom to describe their own experiences; as Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued, "The last thing we as researchers want our participants to do is to tell us their experience in terms that they think we want to hear" (p. 195).

Long interviews as semi-structured, iterative conversations allow shared, contextual meanings to emerge naturally, yielding deep, detailed, vivid, and nuanced data (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). However, as Marshall and Rossman (1999) pointed out, they also pose some limitations. These include difficulty in cooperation between researchers and participants, possible deception on the participants' parts to protect themselves, researchers' inadequacies or lack of experience in listening and questioning, overwhelming and cumbersome amounts of data yielded, and potentially lower data quality. H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin cautioned researchers about the danger in making assumptions about participants' meanings, especially with terminology; rather, researchers should probe and clarify to gain accuracy. Finally, researchers must remain keenly aware of the "paradox of intimacy," which Wolcott (1994) warns can happen when heightened trust between researcher and participant backfires and hinders further study (p. 195).

I overcame Marshall and Rossman's (1999), H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin's (1995) and Wolcott's (1994) noted limitations through numerous strategies. From participant recruitment to post-interview follow-up, I worked hard to establish

comfort, rapport, and mutual respect with my participants. During participant recruitment, I demonstrated researcher transparency by clearly explaining to each participant my research purpose and goals, why I was interested in the topic, what I hoped to accomplish through scholarship and for practical application, how the interview would proceed, and what duration to expect (approximately one hour). I accommodated participant schedules (before, during, or after work as requested) as well as their choice of interview settings (restaurants, coffee shops, meeting rooms, their homes, or their offices—wherever they felt most comfortable sharing their thoughts). At the start of each interview, I reviewed the interview's purposes, emphasized the required IRB protocols and procedures, secured informed consent and permission to record the interview, and, for participants preferring to interview at workplace premises, secured signed consent for any increased risk. I also highlighted steps I would take to ensure confidentiality and data security: using pseudonyms for both the participant and the organization in my transcripts and any public research presentations; storing consent forms, transcripts and tapes in a locked file drawer accessible only to me; and storing electronic files on a secured, non-publicly accessible computer.

During the actual interview, I remained considerate and flexible regarding duration, staying within promised timeframes, shortening interview protocols in two cases to accommodate tighter participant schedules (spending less time on grand tour questions at the start). I also rescheduled three interviews to accommodate participants' unexpected schedule changes. As conversation commenced, I used seven strategies designed to show researcher sensitivity and allow the conversation

partner open up gradually and comfortably (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). First, I created a natural interview environment through ice breaking and rapport building with the participant, often in the form of chatting informally about non-threatening topics such as the weather, traffic, family, or mutual acquaintances or experiences as we walked to the interview setting. Second, I encouraged the participant's conversational competence by starting off with non-threatening, grand-tour questions to ease discomfort and value the participant's experience/expertise. Third, I empathized with the participants to encourage openness and depth, asking probing and clarifying questions to ensure my understanding of their word choices and phrasal nuances; I also respected conversation pauses and offered brief bits of self-disclosure to demonstrate interest in creating shared understanding. Fourth, early in the interview, I gathered facts and basic descriptions about the participant's experience without yet asking emotionally or intellectually difficult questions; by beginning broadly and narrowing questions toward specific details, I allowed the participant to gradually "work up to" more challenging questions. After establishing greater comfort and trust, I asked more sensitive questions in stage five; however, following H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin's recommendations, I only asked such questions if they were necessary to gain insights into the research topic. Toward the interview's end, I employed strategy six, toning down the conversation in intensity to allow participants to feel a greater sense of closure and less vulnerability as we ended our time together. In every interview, I turned the discussion around by asking the participant if anything had been left unasked that should be answered, allowing for greater empowerment in the participant's conversation partnership. Finally, I closed the

conversation by expressing thanks while still maintaining contact, allowing for future follow-up and keeping the relationship open to further development.

### *Participant observation*

Often conducted as a key data collection method for an ethnographic study, participant observation is defined as “a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 91). This method entails attending to and analyzing individual or group activities within a social context (Wolcott, 2001).

Validity in this method comes from the researcher’s “witness,” from learning not just to notice things about the environment, but to notice them as “evidence” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, pp. 135, 139). The level of researcher involvement in participant observation varies, and according to Bogden and Biklen (1998) depends upon the researcher’s identity, values, and personality. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggested that researcher involvement may range from being complete observers (watching phenomena but never participating) to complete participants (engaging fully with those they observe while keeping their researcher role stealth). Many scholars (i.e., Bernard, 1998; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999) caution that complete participation may lead to decreased analytical ability; some researchers lose sight of their researcher role.

As a participant observer, I focused on participant behavior to discover social and cultural meanings found in the setting, attending to contextual clues while simultaneously thinking of perspectives other researchers might bring to the same setting (Wolcott, 1994). I gained entrée through permission from several

organizational leaders and maintained rapport through pre- and post-observation conversations with participants. I also displayed a tolerance for ambiguity by observing meetings without interruption or requests for explanation—demonstrating my willingness to suspend reactions and allow interpretation to formulate slowly.

Following Schensul and LeCompte (1999), I conducted participant observation by trying to capture salient features of the phenomena in concrete detail, discovering local meaning, ascertaining relative importance of details, and recognizing patterns found in social relationships and events through repeated observations. I also took fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999)—detailed descriptions of individual appearance, clothing, posture, possessions, and other indicators of status; descriptions of the environment and activities underway—that served as scientific records and evidence of contextual clues. In addition, I recorded separately in memos my “inferences and personal observations, reflections, hunches, and emotional reactions” (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 115-116; also advocated by Wolcott, 1994) as well as research questions to answer in the future (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participant observation offers several advantages and disadvantages as a qualitative research method: it locates the researcher in the community under observation; it enables researchers to confirm, over time, organization and prioritization patterns; and it provides cultural experiences that may both serve as data and inform other data collection methods such as interviewing (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 91). Participant observers may also witness events and situations not normally accessible to the public, providing greater depth of insight and

understanding (p. 92). The main disadvantage, when compared with other qualitative methods, is the lack of in-depth, individual inquiries (Morgan, 1988); I overcame this disadvantage through triangulation of data collection methods—conducting multiple long interviews and document analysis along with the participant observation—to ensure greater study validity (Kvale, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Specifically, I began informal participant observations simultaneously with participant interviews, noting details and taking fieldnotes while waiting for interviews to begin or in between interview sessions. After several weeks, I began more formal observations, attending various meetings and observing employee-leader and employee-employee pre- and post-meeting interactions.

#### *Document analysis*

According to Potter (1996), documents may serve as a primary data source, but they may also “provide confirmatory evidence and strengthen the credibility of the results of interviews and observations” (p. 96). Qualitative document analysis offers several advantages to other methods. In contrast to the enumeration often involved in quantitative analysis, the qualitative approach allows for greater concept emergence (Altheide, 1987). Also highlighting advantages of qualitative over quantitative document analysis, Berelson (1952) noted the emphasis placed on understanding meaning through context rather than occurrence of single words. Similarly, Kracauer (1952) argued that qualitative document analysis allowed researchers to more readily discover relationships between words and phrases.

Through qualitative document analysis, I examined textual symbols to discover meanings (Potter, 1996) within organizational documents, such as booklets and vision and values statements, as well as four issues of the organization's employee newsletter and its website. Altheide (1987) suggested that qualitative document analysis exposes a message's meaning "assumed to be reflected in various modes of information exchange, format, rhythm and style. . . visual style, as well as in the context of the report itself, and other nuances" (p. 68). Through applying this method, I was able to confirm themes emerging through interviews and observations as well as confirm and enhance previous theoretical claims (Altheide, 1987).

#### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for my qualitative study involved several steps, beginning with choosing and gaining access to my organization. Specific recruitment and sampling strategies informed participant selection, and careful attention to a thorough yet flexible interview protocol provided a framework for guided conversations while still empowering participants in the research process. Participant observation and document analysis enhanced the data from the interviews.

#### *Organization choice and access*

Because my qualitative case study explored a relatively undeveloped confluence of research areas, choosing an appropriate organization was critical. I began researching potential organizations to meet several key criteria: geographical location, size (number of employees), relatively developed internal public relations (employee communication) programs, potential for leader to exhibit particular leadership styles, and an organizational culture known for its spiritual foundations. I



started my search on the Internet, using Google, as well as via scanning issues of the regional business journal, making a list of potential organizations. Next, I embarked on a several-step process of elimination. First, geographically, the organization had to be close enough to allow for multiple site visits across several months. I eliminated organizations beyond a 90-minute driving distance. Second, I determined that organizations with less than 50 employees would likely be too small to have relatively well-developed internal communication programs; likewise, organizations with several hundred employees might be more difficult for me to research relationship development between employees and the organization's top leader. Thus, I limited my search to organizations with approximately 50-150 employees and with some type of official internal communication strategies in place (which I ascertained preliminarily through several phone calls to potential organizations).

Because my research goals included examining potential influence of leadership styles on internal public relations and ensuing outcomes (i.e., relationship building and employee leadership development), I looked for organizational leaders who exhibited characteristics typical of certain leadership styles. In speaking with several employees of an acquaintance at one organization recently showcased in the region's largest newspaper, I discovered an organizational leader with the potential to be an exemplar. (I should note that although I was acquainted with this leader personally, I did not have a close relationship with him nor had I ever researched him or his organization prior to this study.) In addition, in discussing my research project with a local management scholar, I discovered that he had also informally researched this leader's style for a project, and confirmed the leader's potential for my own

project; the management scholar also mentioned the leader's business philosophy, which seemed to fit the descriptions of a spiritually based firm (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999). Further, I attended an opening event for a new branch of this particular organization, noting that the leader's speech regarding his company goals further confirmed both the employees' and the management scholar's perspectives.

To gain access, I then contacted the organizational leader directly to discuss the possibility of conducting research in his organization. We discussed mutual benefits to conducting the research, including the resultant learning which may be applied to improve his organization's internal communication processes, and agreed upon a starting date pending research proposal approvals. To ensure confidentiality and reference ease, I gave this organization the pseudonym, "CommunityBankCorp."

#### *Recruitment and sampling strategies*

CommunityBankCorp has bank branches in eight locations (all within 90 minutes' driving distance), with two more under construction. It employs more than 100 people, ranging from the top organizational leader (and founder) to vice presidents, directors, technical employees, administrative assistants, and customer service employees. In addition to interviewing CommunityBankCorp's leader, I conducted interviews with 20 other employees spanning the gamut of all levels and job responsibilities (including those working in internal public relations), and representing many organizational branches. The leader originally provided me with contact information for the public relations manager, whose position made her familiar with CommunityBankCorp's structure/communication policies; she began as my "encultured informant" (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995, pp. 66-67), helping me

gain access to interviewees and documents, and events and meetings for participant observation. However, just as I received IRB approval to begin field research, my encultured informant left the organization due to her husband's job relocation. Because no other public relations manager was available, I was then introduced to the organization's Chief Relationship Officer (CRO)—the dominant coalition member overseeing organizational public relations, who stepped in to fill the encultured informant role.

I engaged in purposive and maximum variation sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Potter, 1996; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), recruiting participants from all organizational levels based on their knowledge of the situation under study and their willingness to meet with me (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). From these interviews I began snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Potter, 1996; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), asking interviewees to identify other potential participants. I also attempted to engage in theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) based on emerging key themes. In accordance with appropriate data analysis techniques, I sampled until I felt I had reached saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and until I had considered all emerging negative cases and rival interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). I recruited participants via email and followed up with telephone confirmations; a copy of the email recruitment script is included in Appendix A.

#### *Interview protocols and procedures*

*Protocols.* I developed my interview protocols (one for the top leader/founder and one for employees) using open-ended questions and pretested them by conducting two pre-study interviews, one with an organizational “insider” and one

with an acquaintance working in a local corporation, making adjustments to clarify question wording or intent. Each protocol (found in Appendices D and E) began with grand tour questions designed to establish rapport and researcher-participant trust (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). Subsequent questions increased in difficulty and intensity as the interview continued, but eventually decreased the same way to allow less participant vulnerability near the interview's end. At appropriate points during the interview, I used probing and follow-up questions (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995) to clarify participant meanings or expand understanding. I also engaged in limited self-disclosure to increase participant trust and comfort.

Using the semi-structured protocol allowed me to guide the interview while still encouraging participant empowerment. During points in each interview, my conversation partners and I felt free to diverge from the scripted questions and probes to follow relevant tangents, often gaining valuable insights into information I may not have thought to inquire about. At the interview conclusion, I asked all participants if they had anything more to add or if I had missed asking about topics relevant to our discussion. I also asked participants to identify other employees who may be willing to engage in the study (snowball sampling). As chapter 4 will demonstrate, interview results were overwhelmingly positive; to delve more deeply into organizational understanding and to more formally validate these results, I decided after the third interview to add a protocol question that would challenge participants—with sensitivity—to be completely transparent; thus I asked participants, “This sounds too good to be true—is this really for real?”

The protocols were organized according to the study's research questions they answer (see Appendices D and E); excluding the opening and closing sections, all questions related back to literature and theory explored in chapter 2. Following several grand tour questions, the next section focused on RQ1, asking questions related to the top organizational leader's leadership style; these questions began broadly, asking participants to define leadership and list characteristics of good leaders, and then moved to how CommunityBankCorp's leader specifically compares to those definitions and characteristics. The next section was designed to answer RQ2 by inquiring about workplace culture, leader influence on CommunityBankCorp's culture, and foundational philosophies or values of CommunityBankCorp's workplace culture. The third section answered RQ3, facilitating participants' thinking about and responses to internal public relations (employee communications) processes and participants' engagement in those. The final section related to RQ4, and asked about leader-employee relationship building practices and outcomes (including relationship indicators developed by J. E. Grunig and Huang (2000) and Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) as well as empowerment and leadership development opportunities and experiences. The protocol ended with closure and empowering questions, providing opportunities for participants to guide my study through previously unexplored insights and ideas for future participant recruitment.

*Incentives.* Incentives recognize the value of participants' time and thoughts, and help express researcher appreciation. Due to funding constraints, I was not able to offer participants cash or even raffle-drawing incentives. However, I did offer to meet each participant in a restaurant or coffee shop and purchased a meal or drink for them

as a small token of my appreciation. In addition, I expressed my appreciation for participants through smaller gestures, including demonstrating the value of their contributions through intently listening, representing their accounts fairly and accurately in this study, and meeting at times and locations convenient for them. Following the interview, I sent hand-written thank you notes to each participant, and provided them with a summary of my study. In addition, I conducted a member check, both to help gauge my study's validity and to express appreciation to participants by inviting their feedback. Many participants thanked me for the opportunity to reflect on their experience, give voice to their opinions in a protected situation, and contribute to improved organizational communication (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995; Wolcott, 1994).

*Procedures.* The 21 interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 90 minutes in duration. To respect participants' busy schedules and make accommodations wherever possible, I held the interviews whenever it best suited the participants: during the work day (the organizational leader granted permission in advance for employees to take work time for this project); during breakfast, lunch or dinner; or even on weekends. At her request, I met one participant in her home so she did not have to find childcare for her infant. Although I made every attempt to hold all interviews off-site to ensure confidentiality, several participants requested on-site interviews. I accommodated but secured private interview locations in offices or closed conference rooms to lessen risk.

*Participant observation procedures*

I conducted participant observation sessions for a total of approximately 10 hours. These sessions included one-on-one and small group communication interactions between the leader and employees as well as other meetings and activities, providing insight into internal communication, relationship-building, and employee leadership development. With help from my encultured informant as well as suggestions from several other interview participants, I determined appropriate observation situations and locations and made arrangements to attend through appropriate company contacts. As planned, my long interviews, document analysis, and participant observation sessions informed each other and the ensuing data analysis provided direction for further interviews and participant observation opportunities. I also spent several observation hours at two different branch locations and was careful to observe interactions at a variety of employee levels.

#### *Document analysis procedures*

For document analysis, I reviewed all foundational internal communication materials, vision and values policy statements, newsletters, and website materials. Prior to the first interview, I analyzed the organization's vision and values statements as well as the 8-page foundations booklet, an employee guide to the company's purpose and behavioral expectations; the foundations booklet described in detail company priorities, strategic objectives, preferred leadership model, cultural maintenance strategies, "rules of engagement," and communication expectations (including guidelines for email usage). Simultaneously while conducting interviews and participant observations, I analyzed the existing four issues of the organization's employee newsletter, a fairly new internal communication undertaking. I also visited

the corporate website regularly throughout my time in the field to note additions and changes.

### *Data*

*Interview transcripts.* For long interviews, each of my participants granted me permission to audio record. As soon as possible following each interview, I listened to the recordings, transcribing word-for-word my questions and my participants' responses to preserve their actual words and the context in which those words were spoken—the data of qualitative interviews. Only two tapes contained inaudible portions, and only one was of any length; for those situations, I inserted observer comment noting the essence of the missing interview portion as I could best recall it. Transcripts then yielded direct quotes, which became evidence supporting findings and results. I also recorded observer comments in my transcripts, noting participant emotions or intensity, body language and other non-verbal cues, potential meanings and emerging themes, and my own potential biases.

*Fieldnotes.* For participant observation, I recorded fieldnotes in a small notebook. As soon as possible after each participant observation session, I typed these notes, filling in details as fully as possible (Emerson et al., 1995; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). As with interview transcripts, I inserted observer comments to address emergent themes and potential researcher biases (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999).

*Internal documents.* The documents I reviewed served similar purposes to interview and fieldnote transcripts. I photocopied each document to allow for easier



coding. As I reviewed each document, I took careful notes, added observer comments, and attached printouts to each document for efficient data management.

*Personal memos.* As I analyzed data from each collection method, I chose to follow up some observer comments by writing reflexive memos to address emerging themes or potential biases (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 2001). Memos also helped me to explore rival interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis/interpretation may be approached through a variety of procedures, some of which derives from Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach. The grounded theory approach was an appropriate framework for the data analysis conducted here.

#### *Grounded theory*

By allowing the data to form theoretical premises (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a researcher ensures that the data will have good fit (not based on preconceptions), will work (usefulness), will be relevant (because it addresses processes and issues coming from within the research setting), and will be modifiable (meaning the theory endures over time because it is derived from the data but it is flexible enough to grow and change as new data emerges or further analysis is conducted). Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that grounded theory more closely resembles reality because of its emergent, inductive process.

I employed grounded theory by engaging in rigorous data collection, analysis, and interpretive procedures designed to elevate meaning's emergence from the data

themselves (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Miles and Huberman (1994) urged, I engaged frequently in in-process writing, such as inserting asides and observer comments and developing reflexive memos; these practices helped me “bracket” my biases (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 80) and explore ideas while still allowing the data to “speak” and categories to emerge (Wolcott, 1994, p. 10).

*Constant comparison.* The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) involves a complex, rigorous coding process including open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through open coding, I carefully examined the data, line by line, over the entire document, because each document (i.e., fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and documents/archival writing) is “packed” with “nuggets” that need to be “mined” in order to allow the data to clearly speak (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 65); this process produced emergent categories of convergence. Next, I conducted axial coding, a process of grouping and organizing categories and subcategories along axes to show their interrelationships. Later in the coding process, I conducted selective coding to engage in conceptual and theoretical development. Because the entire process was grounded in the data, the emergent results respected the data’s significance and value—and, by extrapolation, the participants’ significance and value.

*Coding, visual data displays, and drawing conclusions.* Following Lindlof and Taylor (2002), I managed and tracked the volume of data—more than 550 pages of interview, fieldnote, and document analysis transcripts as well as reflexive memos. I also engaged in data reductions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) such as “cooking” (Wolcott,

2001, p. 13) and “chunking” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) by coding data transcripts to highlight emerging themes and categories. This process was followed by conceptual development in which I examined the data rigorously to note linkages between emergent categories. These categories then drove further data collection and theoretical sampling as various categories began to converge and build theory.

I used Miles and Huberman’s (1994) visual data display strategy to develop several visual depictions identifying relationships/links between data (or categories). This process helped me to break data into visually digestible chunks to draw conclusions leading toward theory development. I was careful to remain close to contextual cues and the data origins (the participants’ words in the interview or the particular observation session) to avoid elimination of subtle differences in participant perspectives. I also ensured that the visual displays did not appear to be forcing data to fit into existing categories (Charmaz, 2000; Ellis, 1995).

### Validity and Ethics

#### *Accuracy and craftsmanship*

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) equated a qualitative study’s validity with accuracy; researchers achieve this by showing “truth in observation,” searching for “a right interpretation”—although not *the* right interpretation, for there may be many (p. 240). In addition, H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (1995) noted that valid qualitative studies include transparency of the researcher’s process, consistency (accounting for similarities/differences), and communicability achieved through participant member checks to ensure that the research report reflects the participants’ perspectives. Kvale (1995) viewed validity as socially constructed and established a study’s validity

through three criteria: investigation (good craftsmanship/researcher credibility), communication (achieved through conversations with participants, other scholars, and the “general public” to determine accuracy), and action (whether the study’s findings or results hold up under praxis). Kvale suggested that instead of creating a community of mistrust in each other’s work, scholars should conduct research at a level of craftsmanship that leaves little room for doubting accuracy.

*Duration of fieldwork.* In the data collection process, generally, longer time in the field increases validity. For cultural ethnographies, researchers often spend one year collecting data (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). However, for other types of qualitative studies, scholars have suggested staying in the field long enough to achieve participant intimacy and depth of human understanding (Wolcott, 2001). Wolcott (2001) noted the importance of determining when to exit the field; researchers must stay long enough to eliminate performed roles. Because my fieldwork stretched across four months, and because I both interviewed and observed many of the participants, I feel confident that I am reflecting my organization’s reality through my fieldwork.

### *Saturation*

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggested that researchers have conducted sufficient fieldwork when they have achieved data quality, data redundancy, and data abundance, based on Snow’s (1980) idea of information sufficiency. Snow determined that this criterion is reached when researchers have a sense of “taken-for-grantedness” (sensing “routineness” in the field); lack of new information in data collection, also called theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 61-62); and

a heightened sense of confidence due to validity. As I continued in fieldwork through observations, interviews, and document analysis, I reached a point where no new themes surfaced and where all emerging negative cases had been explored, giving me relative confidence that I had approached saturation.

### *Triangulation*

Triangulation, a convergence of several methods, several researchers, or several data sources, offers another strategy to increase validity (i.e., Kvale, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) recommended accompanying triangulation with disjuncture to address both similarities and differences between and within cases. This includes researcher commitment to examining negative cases and extreme outliers (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Expanding the concept of triangulation into “crystallization,” Lincoln and Guba (2003) further underscored the importance of thoroughly considering many complexities to assure convergence and account for data variance (pp. 279-280). I have achieved triangulation through exploring the organization with a three-pronged data collection approach.

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity, or self-reflection on the researcher’s role and voice in the research process, helps to address bias, or preordained theoretical perspectives that can limit research interpretation and findings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). However, reflexivity does not require researchers to drop their own values and adopt those of their participants (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). Through my own reflexive observer comments and memos (i.e., Miles & Huberman, 1994), I was able to address and

bracket my potential bias to keep focus on participants' perspectives. As Wolcott (2001) noted, I addressed any prejudices but also practiced "disciplined subjectivity" (p. 165). My desire to conduct my research in an organization potentially characterized as a spiritually based firm and with an authentic or transformational (and potentially servant/principle-centered) leader stems from my own religious faith. I consider myself to be an evangelical Christian, and see congruence between theories in the foundational literature for this study and the tenets of my faith. In addition, I have experienced several workplace cultures and leaders that were not conducive to excellent internal public relations, employee participation and empowerment, or relationship building between leaders and employees. As I conducted this case study, I carefully recognized these biases and influences and bracketed them appropriately in order to ensure that themes and interpretations emerged from the data and not from my own desires for particular outcomes.

#### *Ethical treatment toward participants*

Participant treatment and involvement also plays a role in increasing a qualitative study's validity as well as maintaining ethical research practices. As noted in Bowen (2004), Jaksa and Prichard (1994) suggested that ethics is "concerned with how we live our lives. It focuses on questions about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, caring or uncaring, good or back, responsible or irresponsible, and the like" (p. 3). During my research, I took seriously my obligation to treat my participants ethically and protect them from potential harm resulting from the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995). As H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin (1995) advocated, I treated participants with respect by listening carefully to understand

culture from their point of view, and allowed them to have voice through research reporting. In addition, I attempted to empower participants and address power imbalances in the researcher-researched relationship; use multiple voices in reporting; anticipate strategies for handling participant-initiated hot topics that might be misunderstood by readers; and balance the participants' viewing of the interviews and observations as safe spaces to open up and reveal sensitive information (Fine et al., 2003; M. M. Gergen & K. J. Gergen, 2003)

#### *Institutional Review Board*

I have complied with Institutional Review Board guidelines, obtaining informed consent (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2002; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), which educated participants on the research's purpose, protected them from deception, and allowed for their approval prior to audio recording. It also offered them the opportunity to ask questions, refrain from answering certain questions, or withdraw from the research process for any reason, although no participants opted for the latter two. Finally, following IRB protocols and procedures ensured participant confidentiality and data security through not identifying participant names or organizations, using locked files/offices and private computers for data storage, and destroying data after five years according to IRB guidelines.

#### *Member checks*

To actively involve participants in the validation process of the qualitative study, I conducted member checks (Kvale; 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995) by mailing to them the final written account in summary form.

In addition, I presented a summary of the findings to the organization's senior leader team and provided a full copy of the report. During the presentation as well as through the mailings, I solicited participant feedback to help determine the account's accuracy and validity (i.e., Ellis, 1995). As H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin suggested, one final confirmation of validity occurs when a researcher shares the account with participants and hears, "Yes, this is the way we see it, too." Numerous participants confirmed the study results as accurate descriptions of their experiences and the organization's leadership style, culture, and internal communication. As one participant noted, "You captured and presented the overall picture of [CommunityBankCorp]. Your objective observations further solidify my experiences here." In addition to receiving participant comments, I and the senior leader team members—at their prompting—spent time after my presentation discussing potential solutions to the few organizational challenges revealed through research findings.



## Chapter 4 – Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my case study, evidenced through inclusion of my participants' words (discovered through interviews), details from my own participant observation field notes, and short portions from internal organizational documents produced or referred to by employees and leaders during the course of the study. As researcher, I recognize my responsibility to choose wisely and with as little bias as possible the data I present as evidence from among hundreds of transcript, field note, and document pages. Yet I also embrace Wolcott's (1994) idea that researcher analysis and interpretations matter—and make a difference—in the way readers understand the data presented; in particular, Wolcott suggested, "Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of a researcher who takes note—and often makes note—of some things to the exclusion of others" (p. 4). Well aware of my own influence in the research process, I made every effort to allow the data to speak for themselves (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and for themes to emerge from participants' words and observed actions/interactions as well as internal documents.

In general, findings revealed interrelated themes. The organization's founder and top leader based his leadership style on his understanding of and desire to live out his own religious faith; this faith foundation permeated the entire organization, from the top leader's style and its influence on the way others led and managed, to the underlying cultural values (both expected and "lived"), to the internal public relations and employee communication practices. The organization's prescribed leadership style demonstrated a hybrid of characteristics found in authentic, transformational,

principle-centered, and servant leadership theory. Cultural values, based on what the leader termed “biblical principles,” focused on positive, relational interactions between all employees—from leaders to entry-level employees. Central to “living out” the cultural values effectively, internal public relations emphasized face-to-face communication whenever possible, whether through formal communication channels, such as frequent, regular one-on-one and team meetings, or informally through interpersonal conversations. Specific outcomes of the confluence of three elements—leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations—included strong relationships among organizational members as well as organizational unity and a commitment to employee leadership development.

I have presented specific findings below according to each research question they address, following Wolcott’s (1994) analytical framework organization pattern. In selecting data for inclusion, I have tried to represent nuances and subtleties in participant perceptions. To preserve confidentiality, I have assigned participants and the organization pseudonyms; I have also included participants’ general position levels within the organization to further increase contextual understanding.

*RQ1: What leadership style is exhibited in the organization’s top leader (as self-ascribed and as ascribed by organizational employees)?*

CommunityBankCorp’s top leader, David, demonstrated a variety of traits and activities characteristic of leaders identified as authentic, transformational, principle-centered, and servant. These include leading in accordance with one’s true self (authenticity), especially as born out of life experiences; establishing, sharing, and “living” a vision and culture consistent with the leader’s authentic self;

communicating effectively with employees; enacting a positive, people-driven approach to leadership; exhibiting a servant attitude toward subordinates; employing individualized consideration strategies in employee-leader interactions; intentionally acting to positively grow and transform employees into leaders themselves; and recognizing and celebrating employee achievements.

*Authenticity.* David's self-ascribed leadership style is "positive," authentic, transformational, servant, principle-centered, and born out of past personal experiences and a deep religious faith. Growing up in extreme poverty in a third-world country, David described his family as "spirit-filled" Christians, although he personally did not "become a believer" until his teen years. He recalled,

It was not a dramatic conversion experience, but rather just  
me getting on my knees and accepting the Lord as my Savior.  
But being born in a very poor family shaped a lot of my faith  
and beliefs.

This combination of poverty and faith, coupled with educational opportunities offered to him in the United States, provided a strong foundation from which David pursued his aspirations and grew his ideas of leadership. He shared,

When I'm talking about being raised in a poor family, I can't even  
describe to you what that means. God's grace has been unbelievable  
in my life. He took this skinny little kid from [a third-world country]  
who was starving, and living in the worst environment. There were five  
of us sleeping and living and working out of a five by five-foot hut. I  
remember my mother repeatedly saying, "Sleep on your stomach so

you'll feel the hunger less." Those kinds of things influence the way I look at life in terms of determination and appreciation for people and all the simple things.

*Consistently authentic vision/culture.* In founding CommunityBankCorp, David stated that his organizational vision was based on his past experiences and religious faith. However, he also shared a specific, pivotal "vision" that he believes came from God, a vision which led him to leave a leadership role in a large banking conglomerate to found a new community-based bank. Originally, David had hoped his high position at the previous organization would afford him many opportunities to spread his "positive influence"; over time, however, a corporate buy-out, restructuring, and working under new top leadership made him realize that at the core, his values and priorities diverged from those of his previous organization. He recalls,

I was going to remold [previous organization] from an old thrift culture into a culture that was very much people-oriented and was about influencing. But after the sale, as I went along, it became very clear that there was a difference of opinion about how you do business, how you conduct yourself, what you're about, you know?

Part of this realization came after a presentation at the New York Stock Exchange. During his talk, David recalled feeling restless and even "angry in my spirit," so that by the time he finished presenting, he felt very strongly that his organization as well as the analysts in his audience did not "know anything about relationships, didn't care about relationships or people. . . all they were worried about was how to make the

next dollar.” He ended up leaving the meeting early, directly after his presentation, and caught the next plane home. He remembered driving straight from the airport to meet his wife at one of his daughter’s softball games. Upon arriving, he experienced a “vision”:

As I got out of the car, my daughter was getting ready to bat, and as I looked around, all the families were lined up around the field. As I stood there, I felt like God laid a vision on my heart, and that was, “This is what community banking is. This is what influencing people’s lives positively is about.” And that’s when I think God said to me, “I want you to build a company that’s built on fundamental biblical principles.” You know, integrity, honesty, passion for what you do, caring for people.

The principles David recounted were similarly noted by interview participants as being integral to CommunityBankCorp’s vision, underpinning leadership styles well as its cultural values and communication processes. Many participants specifically mentioned David’s Christian faith or the Bible as the foundation for such principles. For example, senior leader team member Tamara said, “David is a very religious person, and I know that has a lot to do with how he deals with individuals and with businesses.” Other participants—mainly those employed by CommunityBankCorp for six months or less—suggested that David’s leadership style and the organization’s culture and communication were based on “moral” or “ethical” principles and “just treating people the ‘right’ way.” As Kendra, a branch teller, said, “Here, the leaders want to do things ‘right.’ It’s a better way to treat each other with

all the craziness that goes on in society. . . just the basic treat people as you wanted to be treated.”

Numerous interview participants noted that they looked to David as the top leader to cast the company’s vision, share it with employees, and model it in practice. Key to achieving that objective was maintaining a consistency between visionary words and lived actions. Edward stated that David was both able to identify a vision and to communicate it “in such a way that people want to follow him in achieving that vision. . . . He excites you about the vision in a way that makes you want to be a part of it.” Mason, a mid-level leader, concurred, highlighting the importance of obtaining that vision “buy-in” from all organizational levels:

I think it has to start at the top. It has to be a clear, concise, and agreed-on vision. At [CommunityBankCorp], the manager team members all have that same vision, they all agree, and that’s real important. If you’re not all pulling in the same direction, you’re gonna have a lot of difficulties.

According to branch leader Jared, CommunityBankCorp’s vision goes beyond conceptual buy-in; David takes every opportunity to set the tone for reaffirming and living the organizational vision. “At any function, he’s always big about working parts or the whole mission statement into what he’s saying,” he recalled. “And we’ve heard it a million times and seen him put it into play.” When asked if such reaffirmation “got old” or stale, Jared replied an immediate, “No!” He went on to say:

. . . Because I think we actually do it. So it’s not like we’re just hearing it or saying it a million times. It’s something we actually do.

And you have to be conscious of it, so it's good to have the refresher because it keeps you on your toes and keeps you thinking, "Okay, this is what I have to do every day."

*People-driven positivity.* One way David enacted his vision authentically was through exhibiting an attitude of people-driven positivity in his leadership. According to him as well as to a number of participants who worked with him, David's leadership style has always been based on a desire to influence others' lives positively, from employees to the community at large. For example, branch employee Michael shared that David was "always positive. I don't think I've ever heard anything negative come out of the man's mouth, and he always seems to be in a very good mood." Although every interview participant mentioned that David was "personable" or "likeable," the positivity went beyond simply being "Mr. Blue Skies and Rainbows," as Angela, a mid-level employee, titled David. She noted that he looks at issues positively, but,

. . . he also puts his heart into this, and I think that's sort of what sets him apart. This organization isn't about money, it's about people, and to truly be able to put people first. . . . I don't think everybody gets it, how lucky we are to work some place like this, but I know, and I think most employees know, that every opportunity [the leadership] has to put employees first, they do. We're still a business and we have to make money, but every opportunity David has, he puts employees first.

Jennifer, a mid-level officer, agreed, sharing that in previous organizations, David and other leaders he brought with him to CommunityBankCorp had found it difficult

to watch their employees “being miserable everyday and not want to come to work” because they were not valued or treated positively. “They wanted to see their employees that they cared about being happy, so at [CommunityBankCorp], they have the chance to affect X amount of lives and X amount of families positively,” she stated. For Brandon, a senior leader team member, leading others through positive influence actually fulfilled the organization’s mission, as he noted:

See, in banks you typically have a divide between the people in the branches and the sales force and the people on the operations side, because sometimes they can be at odds in terms of what needs to be accomplished. But you know, we don’t really have that here, and it’s because frankly we [leaders and employees] take the time to talk about how important teamwork is and how important it is for people to work well together and enjoy themselves, and, you know, to feel like they *get* to come to work, not that they *have* to come to work every day.

Audrey, a mid-level employee, maintained that a people orientation set CommunityBankCorp apart from other organizations. She shared,

David and all the other management team truly do put employees first, in every decision they make, really and truly. Every single decision it’s always like, “Well, how are employees going to take this? How is this going to affect them?” And I’ve never been a part of that anywhere else. It kind of takes some getting used to. But that’s why I’m here.

Balancing aggressive risks necessary to stay competitive with maintaining an “employees first” approach to leadership is not easy, but according to interview



participants, CommunityBankCorp's leadership achieved this balance well. As Andrea, another mid-level employee, stated,

I think with David and his team, they take risks but they take calculated risks, because they know that they have 100-plus employees behind them, and their families, so they have to make sure when they take a risk it's not going to negatively impact them. They take calculated risks with their employees in mind.

During two senior leader team meetings observed, David highlighted the impact of decisions on employees; twice he reminded management of the fact that each employee represented a family unit, and the great responsibility the team carried in ensuring those families were well taken care of. When bringing discussion items to the table, other senior leader team members also explained issues from employee perspectives, going beyond financial outcomes.

*Inspired mutual trust.* Another way David, and by extension, the leadership team, demonstrated authentic leadership was through inspiring mutual trust. Every interview participant expressed trust in the leadership's direction, as evidenced by mid-level officer Jennifer's comment: "I think part of why people want to come to work here is because they have trust in the leadership. It's kind of one goes with the other." Speaking of David specifically, senior leader team member Brandon added, "I would pretty much follow him anywhere because I trust him that much."

This trust went two ways. Branch employee Michael shared that in making loan decisions, he felt trusted by his supervisors.

Any time I've had a customer that I've known well but who's

had blemishes on their credit, and I've recommended a loan approval, the leaders have approved them and said, "We trust what you're doing."

Rebekah, mid-level employee, also shared a story where leadership demonstrated trust through backing her in a situation where she had approved a "less than tidy" loan that increased the bank's loss risk. When the loan customer was diagnosed with very aggressive cancer and came to the bank for assistance, Rebekah was able to work out financial assistance in straightening out the risky loans. As she recalled, "The whole thing was so sad, just horrible. But never one time did anyone say to me, 'You didn't do this right.' Nothing critical. It was all about how can we help, you did a fabulous job. Nothing but praise and support." Other participants also described a sense that their supervisors trusted them to be competent on the job, yet still offered assistance if needed.

Two participants from the same branch location, both senior leader team members, did not perceive as great a trust. Although both felt an extremely high level of "philosophical" trust from David and the rest of the management team, for certain business situations, they felt the level of trust to make their own decisions was less than satisfactory. When asked why, both believed it was a matter of the leadership team getting to know them and their constituents better; once the relationships were strengthened, they felt at least somewhat confident that trust would increase. They also mentioned that early in a company's existence, every dollar "counts" more, leaving little room for mistakes.

*Mutual respect.* Along with a level of mutual trust, participants described a level of mutual respect between CommunityBankCorp leaders and employees, a respect that permeated the organizational culture. “It’s very important that leaders here have the respect of their people,” said senior leader team member Ryan, “to make sure people respect them for who they are and for their knowledge.” Several participants mentioned respecting organizational leaders for their knowledge not just because they “knew something.” Branch teller Kendra stated, “The biggest thing in leadership is to know how it feels to be on the other side of the desk or table or whatever you’re working at, to understand that. The leaders here do.” Branch leader Jared mentioned that his leaders treated him

. . . and everyone underneath them with respect. And if leaders treat employees well they’re going to give respect to other people, they’ll be more willing to communicate with those above them, and they’ll be more willing to let leaders know what’s going on out in the branches.

*“Servant” attitude.* In attempting to authentically live out his beliefs and convictions through positive influence, top leader David expressed his leadership style through “serving” others—within the organization and extending outward to the community. He explained,

I’ve always been a firm believer in the servant leadership model, which is really based on the principle of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet, that servant attitude. So I’ve always taken the approach that in leading people, you want to lead by being willing to do the things that everybody’s required to do, but lead that by example.

Through his own observations and interactions with David, branch employee Michael also connected the servant leadership model with the top leader's religious beliefs. He stated,

I honestly and truly believe it grows out of his Christian faith. A “normal” corporate system is your customers or your shareholders are number one, and you put your employees the next to last stage because they're not considered as important as the customers or the shareholders. . . . but the servant leadership model is more of an understanding of how the process really works.

CommunityBankCorp communicated this servant leadership through its “foundations booklet”—an employee handbook that defines one of the organization's strategic objectives as “an authentic management style that incorporates a servant-leader model.” The manual devoted a full page to detailing this model, which included four key principles:

*Grace* – kindness, compassion, positivity, predictability, diplomacy, and a lack of “ego”

*Authenticity* – consistency between words and actions, honesty, setting clear expectations, and providing feedback

*Partnership* – maintaining a spirit of collaboration between leaders and employees, team involvement in decision-making, support for colleagues, reliability on follow-through, and celebrating individuality through allowing colleagues to work within their areas of strength

*Stewardship* – caring for and developing employees, the organization

and the community, recognizing colleagues for good work, holding oneself and one's team accountable, obtaining and maintaining technical expertise, demonstrating a commitment to facilitating professional and personal growth for oneself and one's employees, and consistently modeling the servant leadership model daily.

Every CommunityBankCorp employee had a copy of the booklet, and many participants said that the organization's leaders lived out the written concepts in daily organizational practice. Many called this modeling "practicing what they preach." Others shared stories about how the leadership was willing to "pitch in" and "do whatever it takes to get the job done." One participant, Angela, a mid-level employee, stated that David was "not above doing things. He wouldn't ask you to do anything that he wouldn't be willing to do himself." Researcher observations noted David scurrying around prior to meetings to ensure employees (and the researcher) had seats, and that water and snacks had been provided.

Participants said this servant leadership style permeated the leadership team at CommunityBankCorp, trickling down to employees themselves as they looked for ways to "serve" or help each other. One popular CommunityBankCorp activity demonstrating this leadership style in action involved David and the other senior leader team members cooking an employee appreciation meal (usually breakfast or lunch) several times a year. Michael, a branch employee, commented that this action was "huge, because those folks have extremely busy schedules. To carve out that amount of time to say, 'Hey, you know what, we really appreciate how you take care of things [at work]' really shows the servant leader model." Branch teller Kendra also

pointed out that employees often supported each other in their work, noting, “Everybody’s always there for you. If somebody can’t do something themselves, everybody else chips in to make sure that they get it done.” In addition, researcher observations noted various leaders and employees offering to help each other with everything from moving boxes and supplies out of rooms where water damage had occurred during an ice storm to sharing the workload for portions of projects that went beyond their normal assignments.

*Individualized consideration strategies.* Another important characteristic of David’s leadership style involved his use of individualized consideration strategies often evidenced within an authentic, transformational leadership style. Researcher observations as well as participant interviews confirmed his enactment of several such strategies. First, the established organizational structure itself demonstrated a commitment to keeping leaders visible and accessible to employees. As senior leader team member Ryan noted, that intentional structure helped build leader-employee relationships. “It’s a very open type of management we’ve created in this organization,” he said. “And in David’s management style, he doesn’t believe in a lot of layers. As much as we can we try to stay as flat as possible.” Tamara, senior leader team member who worked closely with branch employees, added,

The levels just don’t seem to be as massive as they are with larger banks. . . . [There’s] less distance between the branch level and their regional president and the CEO, so I feel like I’m an integral part of the things that go on here.

Aside from structure, leadership accessibility and visibility came through “management by walking around.” David mentioned that

. . . the most effective thing I do is wander around. . . and that’s how I feel like I motivate, because [the employees] are watching me, you know? They’re watching the words I use, the way I interact with everybody, all those things.

Employees noted David’s visibility and desire to know employees personally—from his first-floor office located where everyone could see him to the way he frequently stopped by their offices or cubicles to talk, joined them outside for a break, or walked to lunch with them. As branch employee Kendra noted,

I’ve never seen it before where you can just walk in to the building and the public can see the CEO at the bank. . . and one day during my training at headquarters, it was summer and we were going outside during a break, and you know, David came out and talked to every one of us.

According to several participants, David balanced building relationships with ensuring employees still accomplished their work. As senior leader team member Brandon suggested, “He does an amazing job balancing the relationship side with the task side, better than anybody I’ve ever seen in that kind of position in that height in a company.”

Along with describing leadership’s commitment to building personal relationships with employees, participants also shared stories depicting an overall lack of ego among the leadership, another transformational leadership style

characteristic. For example, entry-level employee Tara noted that at CommunityBankCorp, leaders were

. . . not concerned with their titles. At other places I've worked, it's all about the titles, but that's not the way it is here. They'll say, "Don't call me Mr. Whatever or President." They'll say, "Call me by my first name," even if you're not at the same level. They don't look down at you. They want to be at the same level.

Mid-level employee James agreed, saying, "The higher level people, they're not like, 'I'm the leader, you're the lower person.' They're basically saying, 'I'm the same as you.' So it's not like they look down upon you because they have a higher title."

Andrea, another mid-level employee, summed it up this way: "Here, it's not what position you are. It's *who* you are that brings everyone to the table to make a successful team."

In a closely related theme, participants described CommunityBankCorp's leaders setting aside their egos in dealing with their own mistakes. As branch employee Michael noted, "I really truly appreciate that if [the leaders] do something that's not correct, they'll come back to you and apologize, and say, 'I did this and it was wrong.' That's something you don't see very often."

According to numerous participants, leader visibility, desire to know employees personally, and lack of ego led to employees feeling comfortable approaching leaders at all levels with concerns, questions, and ideas. As mid-level officer Audrey noted, "I've never been afraid to approach David with anything, you know, to just go stand in his office door and say, 'Hey, David, you got a couple



minutes?’” Branch leader Jared concurred, suggesting this approachability characterized all organizational leaders and even other employees. Senior leader team member Ryan confirmed an unwritten organizational policy, explaining, “It’s all open door, meaning you can walk into David’s office, my office, anyone’s at any time you want. You don’t have to make an appointment to go to anyone’s office.”

A few participants who worked with other employees in many branches did not share a sense of openness from leadership for employee concerns or ideas. “I know a lot of employees that unfortunately feel more comfortable coming to me to bounce an idea off of me before they’ll go to their manager,” one said.

*Intentionality in encouraging growth/transformation.* CommunityBankCorp’s leadership intentionally encouraged employees to grow and to reach their potential and career goals in a variety of ways. Interview participants described leadership’s decision-making process as participatory and collaborative. Senior leader team member Robert noted that on a recent Best Places to Work survey (administered independently as part of a state-wide contest), employee feedback indicated that

. . . [employees] feel empowered and their opinions are being heard.

And when you think about between 95% and 100% of our employees communicating that on a confidential survey, we must be doing the right thing.

Branch employee Michael confirmed this perception, noting,

Anyone in the building or in the organization has the ability to suggest something that would make it better. Everyone’s empowered, from the part-time couriers to the CEO and president, is what

I've seen.

Mid-level officer Rebekah also gave supportive evidence, stating that her manager “really consults with us about a lot of decisions, you know, products or marketing ideas or other things. He really involves me in everything, comes and seeks out my opinions.”

For mid-level employee Lindsay, who helps train branch employees, receiving input and ideas was invaluable in improving processes. She shared,

We just had an email come from one of the tellers the other day and it was like, “This is what we were kind of thinking. What if we did this?” And it’s nice to know that people are still thinking on how to improve. And we wrote her back and said, “Thanks for the input. We’ll take it higher where it needs to go. We don’t have final authority on it, but we’ll take it there.”

Several participants specifically mentioned that perceived empowerment freed them to do their jobs more effectively. For example, branch employee Michael did not see “a lot of micromanaging, which is nice. The leaders hire people who know what they’re doing and they let them do their job.”

However, two senior leader team members felt that on occasion, David’s focus on achieving goals occasionally led to micromanaging or less participation. As Gary suggested,

Inclusion and participatory involvement by the group in forming the vision is vital, and David is pretty good with that. . . . But if David sees something and he wants it done, sometimes he’s not open to

inclusion relative to what we're trying to do about getting there. He gets very focused and doesn't always see the forest for the trees.

A second vital way CommunityBankCorp leaders encouraged employee growth and development involved regular training. Every organizational employee received at least one full hour of training and development per month, in areas including leadership, relationship development and management, customer service, and cultural values maintenance. These training sessions were executed by the company's Chief Relationship Officer and his team. Again, participants noted the importance and value of these sessions, and expressed appreciation for the organization's decision to hire a CRO, despite its fairly small size (just over 100 employees).

Training also occurred intentionally between employees. Branch teller Kendra shared that "if there's somebody in the branch who does something well, the leaders want you to learn from that person, to listen and to keep your eyes and ears open." Branch leader Jared appreciated the mutual coaching sessions he shared with his co-leader, highlighting the benefits of playing on each other's strengths to learn and improve processes.

Leaders also fostered growth by intentionally facilitating employee career planning. As senior leader team member Maria noted,

We're very focused on developing our people to their maximum personal potential, doing career plans on everyone so that we know where they want to go and they know what they need to work on to get there.

*Effective communication.* Another critical aspect of leadership at CommunityBankCorp focused on leadership's ability to communicate well. Specifically, interview participants noted leaders listening purposefully and intentionally; setting clear expectations; and confronting issues/mistakes as well as rejecting ideas respectfully while still preserving an employee's value and dignity. For example, mid-level officer Rebekah noted,

If there's ever an instant "No, that won't work," it's always followed by a "This is why." And then maybe you're educated about something you have no idea existed or you would have never guessed. But at the very least, it's talked through.

*Employee recognition/celebration.* In addition to empowerment and encouraging growth, organizational leaders also frequently recognized and celebrated employee accomplishments. Senior leader team member Brandon mentioned that David often contacts employees to pass on customer compliments, as evidenced by a story from mid-level officer Audrey. She shared that after one of her first "solo" work sessions with a new employee, David emailed her and copied her supervisor, saying he'd heard she had done a great job and "just wanted to say, 'Way to go! Thanks!'" Branch teller Kendra also highlighted leadership's commitment to employee recognition, recalling that a potential hire had visited her branch on a personal "secret shopping" mission to find out if the company vision was truly being carried out throughout the organization. Kendra said that

. . . I really was just doing my job—I didn't know who she was and I didn't treat her any different from anybody else, but she went back

to them and said, “Okay, what you’re saying about this bank is really working.”

Aside from special recognitions, CommunityBankCorp also plans regular times to express gratitude for employee work. For example, the annual employee appreciation week—complete with numerous employee contests, great food, and fun activities—has become almost legend in the company’s two short years.

Recognitions and celebrations also lived on through stories told in both leadership meetings and the company newsletter. These stories, actually “required” in the foundations booklet to be told at any meeting with three or more employees present, noted example after example of employees going “above and beyond” job expectations.

Several interview participants provided a contrast to consistent recognition. For example, mid-level employee Angela mentioned that “we need to work on individual and team recognition. Some leaders are very good at it and some of them are not so good.” She also noted,

So many people here go above and beyond on a regular basis that it’s just become normal and expected. That’s the kind of people that we have together. You know, someone does something well and then so what? So did 65 other people! But you’ve got to recognize it. And I think [the leadership] has lost sight of that a little bit.

Mid-level employee Lindsay agreed, suggesting that although she knows leaders appreciate employees, perhaps they needed to demonstrate that more.

I’ve had coworkers, mostly in the back office, make comments to me

like, “Us peons?” Everybody here is important, is special, but we need to make sure everyone feels appreciated. Because if you don’t feel appreciated for your job you’re not gonna want to be there.

Finally, participants mentioned one other theme characteristic of CommunityBankCorp’s leadership: a commitment to constant improvement. Senior leader team member Robert noted that although the Best Places to Work survey revealed only two or three negative results out of more than 75, the leadership team spent significant time discussing ways to improve in each of those areas. Senior leader team member Maria also described several areas revealed by the survey as having “one or two negative responses out of about 98 respondents,” noting that despite these “really high” scores, the management team felt responsible to address the areas in question and work to improve them.

*RQ2: How does that particular leadership style influence the organization’s workplace culture?*

As CommunityBankCorp’s founder and current CEO, David has greatly influenced the establishment and maintenance of the organization’s culture through his leadership style. Based on spiritual foundations and what David terms “biblical principles,” the organizational culture prompted a variety of participant descriptions such as respectful, warm/friendly/family-like, team-oriented, supportive/encouraging, fun/enjoyable, accommodating to personal/family life, philanthropic, and open/empowering/participatory. In addition, organizational leadership invested heavily in intentional cultural maintenance through a specific leadership position (the Chief Relationship Officer), cultural training, vision/values reinforcement, written

documents (such as the foundations booklet), storytelling, appropriate hiring and firing, building relationships inside and outside of work, and special committee activities.

*Spiritual foundation.* As previously described, CommunityBankCorp was founded on the top leader's desire to live his life as he interpreted it through his religious faith, Christianity. Other organizational employees recognized David's faith foundation, and some shared the same religious beliefs, which they felt informed the company's business philosophies. As senior leader team member Brandon noted, "Faith is strong for many people in the organization," he said, "and you know, that kind of drives who we are." Mid-level officer Rebekah added, "There's no question to anyone. Everyone's crystal clear on David's faith, and for the most part, everyone brings the same faith to work. That's a huge part of this organization."

Although most interview participants recognized connections between David's Christian faith and the organization's cultural values, those that did not—and those that did not share the same religious faith—still agreed with the moral and ethical principles that guided CommunityBankCorp. For example, senior leader team member Ryan, self-identified as having a strong faith other than Christian, stated,

We have shared beliefs about doing the right thing, about treating people the right way. Maybe from that it's more of a common bond. But for a person [working at CommunityBankCorp] who maybe doesn't have religious beliefs, I think that person still believes fundamentally how to treat people, how to do business in a certain manner.

Edward, another senior leader team member, agreed, noting that although he shares the same Christian faith as David,

Others in the organization might not share that faith perspective, but nonetheless believe in the principles that lead us in terms of respect for each other, respect for each other's families, and encouraging a positive environment for employees, for each other, for our customers, and for our shareholders.

Although David communicated openly in various venues that his strong religious beliefs underscored CommunityBankCorp's vision and values, he stated that he did not require employees to share his specific faith. He expected them to adhere to the principles he felt grew out of that faith.

You'll notice we don't sit there and say, "You must have Jesus," because our purpose is to influence people's lives positively. It doesn't matter who it is, we influence them positively, and then it's going to open the door for somebody to say there's something different about this place, and I don't know what it is but I certainly would love to hear about it. That's what opens the door for us to share the Gospel. Are the majority of our employees believers [Christian]? No, they're not. There's a fair amount that are believers but there's a majority that are very nice people, great people, but they haven't accepted Christ yet.

Mid-level officer Jennifer confirmed David's perceptions, stating,

David will tell people he wants to build a biblical foundation for our company, but that doesn't mean that every person in our company



is a Christian. For example, my supervisor is [another religious faith].

And he doesn't disagree that the rules of engagement we follow or the values statement we have are actually biblically founded; he agrees with them. But if we were labeled as a "Christian bank," he would be very turned off by that.

*Cultural values characteristics.* Participants described

CommunityBankCorp's cultural value in a wide range of terms, all related to the original biblical principles David noted. For example, mid-level officer Rebekah suggested that the organization's cultural values included

. . . honesty, integrity, kindheartedness. There's no tolerance for, you know, the typical things you think of in an office, like cattiness and malicious things people try to do to get ahead. There's just no room for any of that.

"A lot of it is very moral," shared mid-level employee Lindsay, "like you give people the benefit of the doubt and you don't just think that everyone is evil." Added senior leader team member Gary, "It's the integrity, the attitude, the commitment to doing a good job, caring for people and for each other. Those things are attributes in terms of what makes us different. It's indicative of who we are."

Picking up on a theme from RQ1, David's leadership style—which he shared in common with the rest of the senior leader team members—also encouraged CommunityBankCorp's cultural value of respect. "Here, it's the Golden Rule," stated Maria, senior leader team member. "Do unto others. . . ." Echoed mid-level employee Angela, "Basically, it's all about the Golden Rule. It really makes people

want to help each other, interact with each other, be nice to each other. It's a frequent reminder that we're all in this together."

Related to leadership-fostered respect and harmony, CommunityBankCorp's cultural values also included warmth, friendliness, a sense of belonging, and a family atmosphere. "CommunityBankCorp is less of a corporate mentality and more of a family mentality," noted branch employee Michael. Senior leader team member Ryan said, "Here, there's a mutual affection for each other, an emotional connection. It's more than just coming to work. It's creating a bond, a relationship." Angela, mid-level employee, agreed, stating, "We all really like each other for the most part, which is rare." Looking to David as the model for this cultural value, senior leader team member Edward said,

People really do care for each other, and I think a lot of that comes from the top down, because David kind of sets the tone. He's always asking people about things that are going on with them, not in an intrusive way, but because he cares.

Interview participants pointed out that this cultural value distinguished CommunityBankCorp from other corporate cultures. According to entry-level employee Tara, this organization's culture contrasted with her previous workplaces. Lindsay, mid-level employee, agreed.

I mean, you go to work with these people all day, and then you hang out with them after work? I never would have thought about doing that with anybody that I worked with previously. It was like, "No, I think I've had enough of you by now!"

According to senior leader team member Gary, one of his friends who worked in banking on Wall Street, NY, did not understand CommunityBankCorp's friendly, family-like atmosphere, precisely because of this contrast. He shared,

Drives her crazy, because in New York? No way! That's just not the way it works. But she sees how I work and how I manage my people as friends. They're friends first and professionals second.

Teamwork translated into mutual support among leaders and coworkers alike, as several participants pointed out. For example, senior leader team member Ryan described a situation where he and two other employees covered a woman's workload so she could be with her hospitalized father.

Non-issue. . . because we know she would do the same thing for everybody else. That's what it looks like for all of us in any position in here. People make sure they back each other up if there is ever a need or things need to get done.

Allison, a branch leader, also shared, "Here it's supportive, you know? People definitely have your back. Like I have a little one, and if she's sick or it's a snow day from school, everybody's like, 'We got it. You go ahead! Bye!'"

According to numerous interview participants, CommunityBankCorp's cultural values included having fun and enjoying work while still remaining accountable. As mid-level employee James noted, "I love the work environment here. We get our jobs done, but we have fun!" Allison, branch leader, added,

You can be yourself here. We joke. You don't feel like, 'I can't

say that.' I mean to an extent—it's a workplace, after all. But we can just relax. We laugh a lot and we goof off together but still get our work done well.

One interview participant related the work hard/play hard cultural value to a family project with his children.

We work hard but we also celebrate our successes and play hard, too. In fact, I was using that in one of my interactions with my kids on Sunday.

“Here's what [CommunityBankCorp leader] would say. . . let's work hard and rake up the leaves, and then at the end with the last batch, we'll play and jump in the leaves!”

CommunityBankCorp's cultural values also included family and personal accommodations. For example, one participant who had recently given birth appreciated the organization's accommodations for her during her pregnancy as well as upon her return to work. Another participant, Tara, was offered a variety of positions with flexible schedules to help accommodate her in finishing her college education. David shared that at one point, the management team was considering increased daily banking hours and opening branches on Sundays. He recalled, “Everyone was saying you've got to be open seven days a week because banks open seven days get more checking accounts than banks that aren't. But we said, ‘Our employees come first.’” After “struggling” with the decision process, David and the senior leader team consulted with the branch employees themselves, who said, “It *would* have an impact on our family life.”

CommunityBankCorp leadership also valued philanthropy in the communities the bank serviced. As noted in the organization's foundations booklet, all bank officers (not just top management) were required to serve in three community organizations and hold a leadership position in one. Branch teller Kendra approved of this expectation for individual philanthropy. "They expect that of you, that you are on some other board, a non-profit, something that you're giving back," she said. Mid-level officer Jennifer added, "The goal of this involvement is to positively affect the community at large. Yes, it gets our name out there, but it also gives back to the community at a different level." In addition to employees' individual philanthropic and service endeavors, the foundations booklet also detailed a company commitment to contributing "actively and generously" in the communities it served. As evidence, researcher observations noted CommunityBankCorp sponsorship banners at the local ice hockey rink, Little League and Youth Soccer sponsorship plaques, and ads in local school event programs.

Finally, the foundations booklet noted a requirement for each CommunityBankCorp branch to plan and implement an annual community involvement project to benefit its local community. Participants described numerous "Community Day" projects, from breast cancer awareness activities to Relay for Life cancer research fundraising to taking part in the annual city Thanksgiving Day parade celebrations by opening up the branch to parade attendees for cookies and punch. Through these bank-sponsored activities, employees were encouraged to find creative avenues for "giving back."

Finally, nearly every interview participant highlighted leadership's commitment to maintaining the cultural values of openness, empowerment, and employee participation in decision-making. "We definitely have an open door policy where we say, 'Let's talk about this, let's figure this out,'" noted Andrea, mid-level officer. Senior leader team member Ryan also suggested,

I think our culture is very engaging. We want to engage employees and even customers in the process so they feel like they're actually part of our bank. We're trying to build our culture for the long-term.

*Cultural values maintenance.* According to interview participants, as CommunityBankCorp continues to grow—and every participant expected that indeed, the organization would continue to grow and achieve even greater success—maintaining its cultural values will require even greater intentionality. In fact, many participants believed that without intentional cultural maintenance, the organization would lose its distinction, resulting in slowed growth and perhaps less success in the bottom line.

Several interrelated themes emerged detailing CommunityBankCorp leadership's enactment of intentional cultural maintenance strategies: hiring a Chief Relationship Officer, continuing ongoing cultural training, communicating the vision/value statements, engaging in cultural storytelling, continuing participatory and informed hiring practices, promoting relationship-building informally and through activities, and tying cultural values engagement to performance reviews.

First, about six months into the company's existence, CommunityBankCorp leadership created the senior leader team member position of Chief Relationship Officer (CRO). This position carried responsibility for oversight of marketing and external public relations, internal public relations, employee training, customer service, and human resources, as well as some sales support. According to the CRO, cultural maintenance was integral to achieving success in each of those areas. Taking the step early in the company's history to hire a CRO represented a large investment in maintaining cultural values, as senior leader team member Gary noted.

David hired [the CRO] for one main reason—because day one, even though we were not in a position to afford a person of this caliber, David wanted to instill within the bank the value system that CommunityBankCorp's going to be about.

Senior leader team member Edward added, "I'm just amazed that we have somebody like that in our organization at this size and that we can place that much emphasis on the role that he plays. He does a great job of pulling us back to the cultural values."

For David, the decision to hire a CRO was clear from the start. He recalled,

I really felt like I was being led, that this was a commitment we needed to make. And I was convinced and had such a peace about it that within six months people were going to say, "I understand exactly [why you hired the CRO]." But what they didn't understand then was the 15-20 year vision. [The CRO]'s benefit? It's not today. It's not next year. It's 15 years from now, when what this company will be is based on the foundation of what the CRO was charged with. I've said to him,

“You’re the keeper of our DNA,” which comes down to hiring the right people, training them, repeating our values, and keeping that process going.

Training, for which the CRO had oversight responsibility, played a key role in maintaining CommunityBankCorp’s cultural values. For a few interview participants, the training sessions did not always introduce them to new concepts, and on occasion, several expressed mild annoyance at having to spend a lot of time focusing on values they already felt they were applying on the job. Others welcomed the opportunity to “interrupt” the busy pace of normal workdays and refocus on the organization’s vision and purpose.

Another intentional cultural maintenance strategy occurred through frequently and effectively communicating the organization’s vision/values and creating employee buy-in. The organization’s vision and value statements read as follows:

*Vision Statement:* [CommunityBankCorp] will be a high performing regional financial services company that creates financial success for consumer, business and not for profit customers in the [Eastern United States] markets.

*Value Statement:* [CommunityBankCorp] is committed to attracting and retaining employees that are passionate about providing uncompromising service to our customers with a sense of warmth, integrity, friendliness, and company spirit. We value and respect each other because we truly believe that our success only comes from working together for our team’s success.



Researcher observations noted frequent reminders of the vision/values statements. Printed cards displayed the statements on employee desks and workstations, screensavers scrolled them across every computer screen, and leaders and employees referred to portions of them at every meeting observed. Corporate newsletters also published the vision/values statements, and their themes were explicitly or implicitly woven throughout articles. In addition, strategic cultural values maintenance involved vision/values communication through using the foundations booklet as part of new employee orientation as well as ongoing training sessions. Interview participants frequently discussed portions of the foundations booklet as the focus of their recent training sessions, underscoring the importance of constant reminders to keep them focused on the organization's purpose. For example, senior leader team member Brandon mentioned connections between the vision/values statements, the foundations booklet, and the organization's spiritual foundations.

If you look at our foundations booklet, things in there like be loyal to the absent, and not gossiping about people. . . if you read the Bible there's a tremendous amount of information about not gossiping and how destructive it can be and how poisonous your tongue can be. So there are many parallels there between our booklet and the Bible, and it's a driver for us, absolutely.

Senior leader team member Edward also found the foundations booklet unique among corporate policy manuals or employee handbooks he had viewed.

This booklet is one of those things that is so contradictory to

anything that I've ever seen before in a corporate kind of setting. It talks about how we treat each other and how we treat the customers, and the first word in there is grace.

And senior leader team member Robert noted, "I think a lot of companies may have a booklet like this, but the question is, are they living it?"

A third cultural maintenance strategy involved storytelling to highlight and promote organizational values. In fact, the foundations booklet required storytelling as part of its corporate guidelines. As Brandon, senior leader team member, explained,

One of the things that we do to carry on our culture is we have these little story-telling sessions, where any time three or more employees are together in a meeting, we'll tell a story about the culture to kind of illustrate it and clarify it and perpetuate it.

Noting these storytelling sessions first-hand, researcher observations found that on three different occasions, a 90-minute meeting began with at least 15-20 minutes of leadership sharing such stories about employees assisting customers with exemplary service (such as driving to a business customer's retail location in a snowstorm to pick up a deposit because the customer was afraid to drive in bad weather), helping each other accomplish tasks during crunch times (such as an employee voluntarily coming in the day before her wedding to help a co-worker with a particularly difficult project), or jumping in to cover for a forgotten detail (such as an employee who put the DJ bill for the company Christmas party on his personal credit card because the employee planning the party had forgotten to get a check cut;

he was reimbursed, but his willingness to voluntarily do so in the first place was recognized). For every story told at a leadership team meeting, attendees cheered and clapped voluntarily, showing genuine appreciation for the way employees were “living the CommunityBankCorp cultural values.”

As a fourth cultural maintenance strategy, CommunityBankCorp practiced “right hiring.” As Audrey, mid-level employee, noted, “When we hire people, we look for someone who has a good fit for the job, who has the skills and abilities we need, but then also someone that would be a good cultural fit.” Mid-level officer Rebekah agreed.

The higher managers really put a lot of attention to hiring right. You know, when we’re looking for someone, they could have the absolute best skills, they could be the best at what they do, but if they don’t fit from a personality perspective or from a cultural perspective, we just don’t bring them on board.

Senior leader team member Brandon shared that the foundations booklet actually served as the basis for the interview process, noting Human Resources provided all prospective employees with a copy of that booklet and spent significant time discussing its contents to ensure job candidates had a clear picture of the organization’s cultural values and expectations prior to taking a position.

Returning to the idea of CommunityBankCorp’s cultural “DNA,” top leader David noted the importance of including multiple employees in the hiring process to ensure cultural maintenance. As he stated,

That DNA is built around values like people having a positive and

cheerful attitude, having honesty and integrity and caring for people. . . people who are family-oriented, who are community oriented. That's the DNA makeup here. So we have four or five people interview everybody that comes in because every time we hire somebody we want them to add to our DNA positively.

At times, ensuring cultural fit meant leaving key positions open for months prior to finding the "right" hire. It also meant firing people who, at the start, appeared to fit the culture but in the end, did not. Jennifer, mid-level officer, noted, "We don't tolerate people treating other people with ill will. I mean, there's people that have been let go because they've done things that were disrespectful to other employees."

CommunityBankCorp also maintained its cultural values through informally and intentionally encouraging employees and leaders to build relationships and simply "have fun" with each other. As previously noted, employees informally spent time getting to know each other during breaks, at lunch, and through after-hours encounters. Often, leaders and employees enjoyed casual times together through sharing meals out, stopping for a drink after work, or watching sports or movies together in their homes. CommunityBankCorp leadership also intentionally promoted relationship building through sponsored activities at work. For example, soon after the company started, senior leader team member Maria was charged with creating a Spirit Committee to brainstorm and implement regular activities to engage employees and leaders with each other. Key to that committee's success, Maria contended, was engaging employee involvement from every branch; regular meetings and idea

solicitation from across the organization ensured stronger activity participation while at the same time raising employees' feelings of empowerment and collaboration.

A final CommunityBankCorp cultural maintenance strategy involved tying the cultural values to performance reviews. This strategy built on all the others to continue driving home to employees the importance of keeping the organization's cultural distinctions alive through daily practice. As David explained,

We rate employees not just on how good they are at their job but how well they match with values. They measure it when it hits their pocketbook because they can get a rating on values. . . . And I say to them, "Don't make me a liar!" Because if they don't live out these values then somebody's gonna say, "David, you're a liar because you say this is what you're about but the people aren't living it."

*RQ3: How does that leadership style influence internal public relations (employee communication) practices?*

CommunityBankCorp's leadership model greatly influenced the organization's internal public relations and employee communication practices. As senior team leader Brandon noted,

If you have leaders doing the right things, you'll always have open communication because you won't have fear in the workplace. People will feel their opinions matter and they'll feel valued. So you'll get that open communicating if leaders are leading in the right way.

In particular, CommunityBankCorp's top leader David—as well as the rest of the senior leader team—exhibited authentic, participatory, and open communication

consistent with the organization's prevalent leadership style. Formal internal communication processes fell under the Chief Relationship Officer's purview, and flowed through a variety of channels. Within the formal processes as well as informally, CommunityBankCorp's internal communication was characterized by timely, open, two-way, and supportive transactions.

*Leader communication characteristics.* Interview participants said that leaders communicated "well" and frequently, and set clear expectations, practiced good listening skills, and acted beneficently in confronting issues or rejecting ideas.

First, as senior leader team member Maria mentioned, "Regular and frequent communication is important, and we're really requiring of our leaders in that way." Branch leader Allison concurred, stating, "Here, they communicate. You know what their vision is and you don't have to guess, and everybody knows what their expectations are of the organization and of the individual." Rebekah, another mid-level officer, added, "David makes it clear where we're going and what's expected, and then he walks the walk rather than just being a figurehead that shouts out commands and then does his own thing."

Numerous participants also pointed out that David and other leaders truly listened to employee ideas. Senior leader team member Robert found David's listening ability surprising, saying,

The biggest thing I've found about David is I didn't expect him to be as good of a listener as what he is. He's been very successful and has a very good reputation, and until you get to know him, you would expect that because of those qualities he wouldn't be as good of a listener as he is.

Brandon, another senior leader team member, agreed, noting a give-and-take approach to idea exchange.

David and I sit down and we talk about things and we work through them, and we don't always see the same things in the same way. Sometimes he'll just say, "Brandon, we have to do it this way," and sometimes he'll say, "Brandon, it's your call."

Participants stated that David's model of listening was shared by other organizational leaders as well. In fact, senior leader team member Robert noted that "listening well"—and empowering employees by doing so—was actually part of CommunityBankCorp's monthly leadership training.

When someone comes in and there's an issue, I don't try to resolve their issue but actually let them work their issue out and I just listen. Our leadership is being trained at not being forceful in a conversation, but rather kind of let [the employee] bring it out on the table and kind of help them along by listening.

Participants noted David's expertise in communicating value for others, evidenced in the way he preserved employee dignity even when confronting an issue or rejecting an idea. As branch employee Michael shared,

Even if David's upset about something, he always has a kind and positive way of explaining what was wrong. And if you tell him something and he totally disagrees with it, he tells it back to you why he doesn't agree with you in a positive way that you feel he actually listened to what you had to say and is responding to it. I see that with the way that all the leaders act.

Michael also appreciated that leaders were quick to confront mistakes rather than storing them up, and helpful in their confrontations. For dealing with disagreements or differences of opinion, senior leader team member Maria encouraged employees to resolve matters quickly and only involve the affected parties. She noted that modeling this conflict resolution strategy helped to foster strong communication as well as respect for others—key cultural values for the organization.

Senior leader team member Brandon summed up CommunityBankCorp's leadership communication as follows:

It's about frequency of communication. So it's sharing as much as you can as often as you can. It's also about setting clear expectations, giving people candid feedback, confronting people when things are not going right but doing that in a way that fixes the problem but keeps the person's self-esteem high and keeps the relationship in tact long-term.

*Formal internal communication processes.* All formal internal communication processes at CommunityBankCorp were created and implemented by employees reporting to the Chief Relationship Officer. In particular, formal communication occurred through the company intranet website, email notices and blasts, a quarterly newsletter, company-wide voicemail messages, and face-to-face supervisor/employee and team meetings. Again, the foundations booklet outlined guidelines and expectations for internal communication.

First, "Rules of Engagement" included the following communication-specific guidelines: be loyal to the absent (regarding gossip); give people the benefit of the doubt; don't make assumptions; respond to the person, not the position; and approach



every situation in a positive helpful way. In addition, written customer service expectations—which several participants said were to carry over into employee interactions as well—grew out of the acronym GREET (G = Glad, R = Ready, E = Eager, E = Enthused, T = Tuned in), and delineated communication-related explanations for each word in the acronym. One booklet page provided directions for company emails, including best usage (sharing information, summarizing meetings, scheduling, recounting decisions, recognizing people for good work, and asking simple questions) and practices to avoid (when someone is angry, with potentially controversial or negative interpretations, with potentially confusing content, when trying to persuade). In addition, guidelines reminded employees of common courtesies such as “please” and “thank you,” and directed employees to choose the telephone or face-to-face conversation over email exchanges when possible or when in doubt as to appropriate email usage.

Through researcher observations and in the context of interviews, participants frequently underscored the company’s preference for face-to-face communication. Senior leader team member Ryan said,

If it doesn’t need to be done in email, don’t do it in email. Pick up the phone, because when you talk to somebody, you pick up something in their voice which you never pick up in email, and you might pick up something in email never meant to be there.

Lindsay, mid-level employee, added, “Usually, we go face to face here, which is kind of nice. It’s easier to understand people face to face.” Mid-level officer Rebekah summarized, “I can’t think of any other place that took the time to care, the time to

educate employees about appropriate ways to use email correspondence. But then again it all boils down to our culture. Things like that matter here.”

In addition to encouraging in-person communication over email or telephone (except where face-to-face communication was not possible), CommunityBankCorp used frequent, regular meetings as part of its formal internal communication process. Participants at all levels were aware that senior leader team members met every Wednesday, and appreciated that within about 24 hours, the leaders held team meetings to share information discussed by the management. In those team meetings, leaders also solicited employee feedback and ideas, which they then took back to the next senior leader team meeting. Several other company groups, such as those titled “officers” and various committees (loan, Spirit, etc.) met at least quarterly or even monthly. And those senior leader team members and committee members working remotely (not at the main headquarters) came on site at least monthly for meetings; weeks when they did not attend regular meetings in person they participated by conference call.

Two participants who worked closely with branch employees expressed concern that perhaps not all branch leaders were keeping their employees as informed as they should. These participants “just had a sense” that sometimes branch employees felt left out or less “in the know.” In addition, some participants, especially those not on the senior leader team, sometimes found the multitude of meetings “a little” frustrating. As mid-level employee Lindsay stated,

You have to go to these meetings, and you want to find out what’s going on because it has to do with you! So it’s nice to know what’s going on,

but at the same time sometimes the meetings seem just pointless.

The days when you feel overwhelmed with other work are the worst, because you just sit there with all these things on your mind.

Lindsay did note that at times when she faced a particularly tight deadline for something, her supervisor was willing to allow her to leave meetings early or skip them altogether.

Aware of the occasional employee frustration over the amount of meeting time, David maintained that “face time” was critical to excellent internal public relations and leader-employee communication.

I like the face to face. People will look at it and say, “That’s a lot of time,” and I say, “No, it’s not the time, it’s the process of having a weekly meeting where you’re looking at people eyeball to eyeball, face to face, watching their tone and just their facial expressions. That builds accountability.

*Internal public relations/employee communication characteristics.*

Participants described the organization’s internal communication as frequent, timely, open, and two-way. For example, branch teller Kendra stated,

The communication is out there and it’s open. I don’t see anything hidden. And we’re informed when things are going to change, which is nice. In a lot of companies I’ve worked for the public would know before we would know internally what was happening. We wouldn’t have a clue. But it seems like they’re on top of that here.

Mid-level employee James agreed, noting, “Here, they keep us in the loop and let us know what’s going on.” Senior leader team member Tamara added,

There’s a lot of communication here. Regional supervisors meet with their direct reports at least once a week to find out how things are going, and that two-way communication holds everybody accountable.

Participants noted that this open communication sometimes provided information beyond that required. As Allison, branch leader, described, “My supervisor is very, very open. She tells us stuff we don’t necessarily need to know, but it’s really nice to know. And it’s nice to have that information.” Added Jennifer, another mid-level officer, “I might not see the reports senior management sees every Wednesday, but on a quarterly basis I know if we’re on target. I have the information I need to know where the growth is, where I need to be.”

Participants especially appreciated that leaders communicated information of all types. “Good communicators communicate consistently rather than just things that they want you to know. David will share the good with the bad, and I think that’s crucial. I don’t want to just hear what they want me to hear,” said mid-level officer Rebekah.

Robert, senior leader team member, summarized CommunityBankCorp’s internal communication as follows:

Our employees feel like they’re informed with what’s going on.

They know the direction of the company, where the company is going.

And when you have people that are informed, and they feel like

they can make a difference, everyone in our organization can make a difference, I think it will go a long way for what we're trying to accomplish.

Although participants generally felt informed and described internal communication as open, two negative examples emerged. First, branch leader Allison shared that on one occasion, her team was not informed about an employee stock option program until the program was closing. Second, branch employee Michael explained that sometimes being in the loop meant knowing information as it was still under discussion, which potentially caused confusion.

With it being as open as we are here sometimes you get told this or that and then it changes before you even know it. I might hear something in the middle of a discussion or at the beginning of plans for something.

And then by the next time I hear about it it's been completely changed.

*RQ4: How does the confluence of this particular leadership style, the organization's internal public relations practices, and workplace culture facilitate leader-employee relationship building? What are the resulting outcomes of leader-employee relationship building?*

As clearly evidenced under RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, CommunityBankCorp's top leader, David, ascribed to specific spiritually based principles that provided the foundation for the organization's promoted leadership style, cultural values, and internal public relations practices. The confluence of these three elements working together led to well-developed, strong, and positive leader-employee and employee-employee relationships. As senior team leader Edward noted, it made sense that

genuinely caring for and liking each other contributed to relationship building. “Because you enjoy the people you work with,” he said, “you have strong relationships with the people you work with.” Mid-level employee Audrey added, “Everyone here has had a positive effect on me. I can’t think of a single negative relationship that I have or one that has hindered me being able to do my job or the progress of the organization.” In addition, senior leader team member Gary suggested that relationship building develops a care for fellow workers as well as customers that has proven both distinctive and critical in CommunityBankCorp’s short history.

We’re a bank that prides ourselves on the way we take care of each other and the way we take care of our customers, because it’s all the same environment. I think that’s what makes us different and that’s key to what our growth is. It’s a team that knows each other, we’re proven performers, and we’re successful as a result of that.

As mentioned by participants, several key indicators demonstrated relationship strength and organizational unity, including trust, control mutuality (empowerment), organizational commitment and loyalty, motivation/productivity, and job satisfaction/enjoyment.

*Trust.* Participants affirmed their trust in CommunityBankCorp’s leadership as well as in its vision and the future of the organization. In particular, trust took on various forms with subtle differences. For example, senior leader team member attributes trust to strong interpersonal relationships, stating, “What we have created and what kind of makes our organization special goes back to getting to know our people not just professionally, but personally. I think by doing that it creates trust.”

For other participants, leaders earned trust through keeping their word. As mid-level officer Audrey, suggested, “I would say I trust the members of management. When someone tells you something, they’re genuine, they mean it.” In addition, mid-level officer Rebekah noted, “Trust is something that’s built by follow through. Here we see come to fruition what [the leaders] have promised or said they’d do and having them back you up or support you when you make a decision.”

Especially critical in a start-up organization, trust that leaders were concerned for their employees individually as well as for the organization’s future also emerged as a theme. Mid-level employee Andrea shared, “I really just believe in where our team and David are taking the company. I believe they are taking us in the right direction for the right reasons.” Rebekah added,

It’s all new and scary, a new bank, and sometimes it all seems very overwhelming. But many times if I’m worried about something, I just think to myself, well, David will have it covered. I’m sure it’s been thought through. I definitely think there’s that level of trust.

However, trust at CommunityBankCorp did not mean that employees felt completely comfortable doing or saying whatever they wanted within the organizational context. Senior leader team member Tamara explained,

Is there a level of trust that you can always say what you want to? No, I mean certain things I would like to say, no. You have to weigh what is really important. But I trust that I can go to my supervisor with anything. There’s a great level of trust that you can confide in somebody if you need assistance or aren’t sure how to handle something the right way.

One negative comment regarding trust emerged from the research. Michael, a branch employee, described a situation where an employee friend of his felt that one leader had not followed through on something that was promised within a particular timeframe. “I may only be hearing one side of the story,” he shared, “but it does make me a little cautious. . . . and it’s not a good testimony for that leader. But on a scale of 1 to 10, I’d still rate my trust as a 9.5.”

*Organizational commitment/loyalty.* According to participants, trust built on strong relationships led to greater loyalty and commitment. CommunityBankCorp’s status as the #1 Best Place to Work reflected employee loyalty and satisfaction, but participants detailed ways they and their co-workers demonstrated their organizational loyalty. Some showed commitment through extra time and effort on the job. As senior leader team member Edward noted, “Because someone trusts you to do your work, you’re more willing to work extra hours, to put in the time that’s required.” Mid-level employee Lindsay concurred, stating,

There’s a high loyalty. Most anyone will stay past normal hours to get things done. . . . You don’t have to, but you want to stay and help. You could say this is an 8-5 job and I’m out of here, but I’ve never seen anybody do that.

For others, like mid-level officer Rebekah, loyalty came through willingness to work for slightly lower pay, at least in the bank’s first few years. Commitment and loyalty also manifested themselves through employee retention. Jared, branch leader, noted,

CommunityBankCorp is very big on retention because we want employees that are going to come to work here and stay here and



grow with the company. And in any other bank you look at in the area the turnover rate is astronomical. Branches are turning over like 3-4 times a year sometimes. But here you don't see that.

*Motivation/productivity.* Another relationship indicator present at CommunityBankCorp was employee motivation and job productivity. In particular, participants noted that the combination of leadership style, workplace culture, and strong communication increased their desire to work hard and help the company succeed. For example, mid-level employee James stated,

If you treat employees right, they'll give it right back in return with their work and everything else. A lot of corporations treat the customers first and then look at the employees. Here it's that the leaders care about you and want to make sure everything's okay. If anything is wrong, they are here for us. And then of course that makes you want to be that way with your customers, too.

Rebekah, mid-level officer, added,

I personally try to do the absolute best job that I can do. You have a stake in it, you know? I've worked at companies where, well, especially when I first got out of college, I could have cared less. I was just putting in time. This is not like that at all.

*Job satisfaction/enjoyment.* As evidenced in the previous data, participants derived great satisfaction from working at CommunityBankCorp. Mid-level employee Lindsay enthused, "I really love working here. I love our leaders and my coworkers. It's a great place to work! I mean, I enjoy coming to work and I'm not

planning to leave.” Entry-level employee Tara said, stating, “I just love the people, the environment, the company, everything about it here!”

Job satisfaction and enjoyment also trickled out from participants to community members through informal, often serendipitous organizational promotion. For example, branch leader Jared described encounters with friends and acquaintances who ask him about his job. “When people ask me where I work, I don’t just tell them where,” he said. “I tell them a little bit about it and it’s an exciting thing, and I try to get them pumped up. I think it’s fun here! I really enjoy it.”

*Additional relationship outcomes.* Two other relationship-building outcomes emerged from participant interviews and researcher observations: organizational unity and leadership development. First, a powerful sense of unity pervaded the organization. As senior leader team member Ryan noted, “Our employees are the face of the organization, and they are all on the same page, being engaged, wanting to come to work.” Mid-level employee Lindsay added, “I think everyone here feels the same sense of responsibility.” In addition, senior leader team member Maria commented, “We all kind of believe in the same values, so that really helps knowing that we have the same beliefs, the same ideas, the same expectations. That kind of grounds people.”

For top leader David, unity meant synchronizing all aspects of the organization to achieve an integrated whole. He explained that leadership style, communication, and cultural values contribute to CommunityBankCorp’s brand. “At the end of the day, [our employees] hear us talking about it, they see leaders living it, and it’s all in alignment, which is what most companies are missing.”

Second, with regard to leadership development, CommunityBankCorp's leadership style, cultural values, and internal public relations empowered employees to grow as leaders within the organization. As previously described under RQ1, specific leadership training and coaching sessions through the CRO's office, leader modeling across the entire senior leader team, and intentional career path planning all increased employee opportunities for leadership development. In addition, collaborative decision-making and problem-solving helped employees hone their leadership skills through less formal means.

Another concrete way leadership development will be implemented in the coming year involves head tellers becoming an integral part of the bank's performance review process. According to Maria, the process will start with branch managers modeling how to train, set expectations, teach process, and give guidelines.

Top leader David added his own vision and purpose for employee leadership development.

When you look at the average age of the current leadership team, it's 43! So I've always said to them, it's a young team. So 20 years from now, someone might be wanting to buy us out and we might be saying, "What do we want to do with this company?" And if that's so, shame on us. Because at that time if we haven't developed the next generation of leaders, then we may not have a choice. But if we've developed the next generation, I would like nothing more than to walk away and say, "Now you guys take over with the same vision."

*Future challenges*

Although not specifically sought through the research questions or interview protocol, future challenges for CommunityBankCorp emerged as a theme from participant interviews and researcher observations. For participants, challenges emerged in two areas related to growth: sometimes overwhelming job responsibilities and concern for cultural maintenance.

*Overwhelming job responsibilities.* In its two short years, CommunityBankCorp became the fastest-growing start-up bank in the history of its state. Equipped with an aggressive growth plan in the coming years, the organization's status is unlikely to change. However, participants noted that despite their excitement in being part of the organization's success, at times the whirlwind pace left them feeling a little overwhelmed. As mid-level officer Audrey commented, "Sometimes I feel like if I was just doing one thing I could do it really well, but I'm doing three of everything and I feel like I'm not doing them all well. So sometimes I wish it would just slow down a little bit." Branch teller Kendra expressed concern over the organization's ability to maintain its relational distinctives with customers, saying,

[In previous jobs] I'm used to fewer bodies mass-producing people in and out the door. But here they want you to take time with the customers, spend time, and that is different. But sometimes it worries me that we're not building thick enough before we're spreading out.

Andrea, a mid-level employee, added,

I think as we continue to grow, the responsibilities that we all have are obviously going to be maxed even more. And while we don't mind wearing

1,000 hats, sometimes they can get top heavy! So I think we need to remember that while it's okay to expand out, you also need to expand within. And this coming year, we also need to make sure we spend a greater emphasis within the branches, really getting them operationally sound and even more effectively working as a team.

*Concern for cultural maintenance.* Many participants expressed concern that as the organization continues to grow, the “family” feel and personal relationships could get lost. Mid level officer Jennifer commented,

I ask this all the time. I always say to my supervisor, “Remember when there was like 12 of us?” And you know, I wonder what it's going to be like in five years. Is it still going to feel the same? I don't know. But the forward thinking and the intentional things that the company is doing is trying to ensure that we protect that.

Senior leader team member Tamara added,

I think that's probably the biggest challenge. . . When you're small, you're intimate. But the bigger you get, it's harder to do that. I think we need to really be able to pay attention to that as we continue to grow. We need continue to get folks mixed around so we do keep that intimate relationship.

Through researcher observations and participant interviews, several themes presented themselves as ways CommunityBankCorp was addressing these challenges, especially the concern for cultural maintenance. For example, observations at weekly senior leader team meetings noted a balance of time between “business” task

discussion and “relationship” or cultural discussion. As described previously under RQ3, leaders devoted nearly a third of the meetings observed to celebrating and recognizing employees evidencing cultural values; additional meeting time covered leadership and cultural training as well as discussion of cultural maintenance activities.

David addressed cultural maintenance concerns. When asked, “How are you going to keep it going, David?” he responded that recently, the company was “split” into six regions, each with a senior leader team member as its regional director. “If it’s just one big ‘blob,’” he said, “I think we’ll have difficult time.”

For CommunityBankCorp, addressing future growth challenges will require ensuring that hiring and equipping employees keeps pace with organizational “spread” through adding new branches. It will also require leaders maintaining the same level of care, training, and relationship-building in the future as they did from the organization’s start. According to participants, practicing the servant leadership style (expressed authentically and transformationally), developing leaders throughout the company, ensuring cultural values maintenance through “right” hiring and constant training/reinforcement, and keeping internal communication processes open, two-way, and face-to-face will be crucial for CommunityBankCorp’s continued success.

## Chapter Five – Discussion

Through this study, I explored confluence of internal public relations, leadership styles, and organizational culture—specifically, in a spiritually based workplace (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999)—in order to better understand their influence on leader-employee relationship management. To achieve these ends, I conducted a case study using a three-pronged data collection approach that included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and internal document analysis. For the interviews, I sampled leaders and employees of varying levels across the organization (including headquarters as well as remote-location branches). Participant observations examined senior leadership and team meetings, training sessions, one-on-one meetings, and informal leader-employee interactions. Internal document analysis reviewed in-house newsletters, vision and values statements, the corporate website, and foundational company publications. Throughout the process, my goal focused on discovering how the self-ascribed and employee-ascribed leadership style (for both the organization's top leader and the senior leader team), the organizational culture's characteristics and values (as well as how employees find meaning through them), and the company's internal public relations excellence level (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002) combine to influence internal relationship-building processes and management.

Results indicated that this confluence facilitated strong relationship building between employees and organizational leaders as well as between employees across the organization. The confluence also promoted intentional leadership development among employees, through both specific career goal planning and opportunities for honing individual employees' leadership skills.

This dissertation is uniquely a public relations study because it highlighted the central role of internal communication in fostering effective relationship management between all organizational employees, as well as the effect of internal public relations and relationship-building practices on organizational unity and employee leadership development. However, study results also clearly underscored the roles of leadership style and organizational culture in establishing and maintaining internal public relations policies and practices. Each of the three areas researched influenced the others, and when combined, produced a hybrid environment that nurtured organizational unity as well as strong relational and leadership development outcomes. As the findings indicated, gaining greater insight into organizational relationship management (as well as employee leadership development) requires more than separate or distinct explorations of key concepts. Rather, such insights are most accurately informed and understood through exploring multiple concept convergence to provide a relationship-nurturing, growth-encouraging environment.

#### Theoretical Connections to Research Findings

Ideally, to draw clearer connections between existing theories and research findings, I would present this section in the same order as chapter two's literature review. However, because study results highlighted the founding leader's significant influence on organizational culture and internal public relations as well as the resulting hybrid impact on relationship management and employee leadership development, I have chosen to outline connections first to leadership literature, then to organizational culture and public relations literature (including power control), and



finally to relationship management literature. I believe this more accurately reflects the organizational realities emerging from the data.

### *Leadership style*

CommunityBankCorp's founding leader and current CEO espoused and practiced a combination of related leadership styles: authentic, principle-centered, servant, and transformational. He and the senior leader team prescribed this leadership model in their organizational literature, in leadership trainings, and in employee interactions.

*Authentic leadership.* CommunityBankCorp leadership (top leader plus senior leader team members) demonstrated numerous authentic leader characteristics, including positive leader influence characterized by deep self-understanding; behavior consistent with original, personal beliefs and convictions; positivity; and desire to lead for ego-less reasons (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio et al., 2004; Erickson, 1995; Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004; Harter, 2002; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Terry, 1993). As evidenced through interviews, application of this leadership style authentically originated with the founder/top leader's past life experiences and pivotal trigger events such as his religious conversion and a clear vision, received at a specific moment in time, to found the organization (Gardner et al., 2005). Moreover, the organization's prescribed and lived leadership style illustrated commitment to growth/development in both the leaders and their followers, as well as selflessness in understanding the leaders' primary roles of valuing and supporting employees (Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004).

*Principle-centered and servant leadership.* Within an authentic leadership framework, CommunityBankCorp's leadership and literature express servant leadership based on biblical principles. Data clearly indicated an organizational foundation of specific principles that declared expectations for leader and employee behavior and interaction (Covey, 1992). Stemming from these principles, leaders exhibited a desire to serve others in the workplace (Greenleaf, 1970, 1998), beginning with leadership and trickling out to employees at all levels. In addition, leaders employed participative management and placed finding meaning in work (i.e., "redemption") above profitability (DePree, 1989; Depree in Lee & Zemke, 1985)—although the organization's business success suggests that one was not at the cost of the other. In demonstrating servant leadership, CommunityBankCorp's leaders enacted nearly all of DePree's (1992) and Greenleaf's (as noted in Spears, 1998) theorized characteristics, including, among others, listening, empathy, stewardship, integrity, vulnerability (openness), courage in relationships, presence, commitment to growth of people, and community-building. Consistent with Block (1993), organizational leaders also held each other and their employees accountable by looking at their service to others and their commitment to organizational values. In addition, organizational leaders intentionally created an organizational culture that fostered employee growth, trust, empowerment/autonomy, greater self-worth, and value for and responsibility for others (Chapell, 1993; Melrose, 1995). Finally, consistent with Fry's (2003) model of spiritual leadership, CommunityBankCorp leaders worked to ensure vision and value congruence that fostered high levels of organizational commitment and productivity among employees.

*Transformational leadership.* CommunityBankCorp's leadership style illustrated numerous charismatic and transformational leadership characteristics (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass 1985; Burns, 1978; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Yukl, 2002). Leaders actively engaged in developing their followers into leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass 1985; Burns, 1978). Congruent with Avolio and Gardner (2005), organizational leaders went beyond rhetoric, energizing their followers through positive modeling to intentionally create and promote specific cultural values and moral perspectives. In addition, leaders also consistently used individualized considerations in their leader-follower relations through friendly/nurturing behavior, commitment to empowerment, and supporting/encouraging followers according to their individual needs (Bass, 1985; Block, 1993; Covey, 1992; DePree, 1989; Greenleaf, 1977; Huey, 1994, Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Musser, 1997).

As evidenced from employee responses as well as from leaders' expressed desires, employment of transformational leadership in this particular setting confirmed previous workplace leadership research regarding organizational commitment (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2004; Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003), effectiveness of shared vision/goals (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Fairhurst, 1993; Farmer et al., 1998; Haas et al., 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982), effective goal/vision dissemination (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Romm, 1999), leader-employee relationship strength (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), and employee self-efficacy/cohesiveness and high work performance (Kirkpatrick, 1996; Pillai & Williams, 2004; Seltzer & Bass, 1990). The study also

confirmed Kark et al.'s (2003) connections between transformational leadership and follower motivation, morality, and employee empowerment, and did not lend support to the idea that this leadership style fosters employee dependency on leaders.

### *Organizational culture*

Confirming Schein's (1985) assertion, findings demonstrated that CommunityBankCorp leadership and culture work interrelatedly, specifically because of the founder/top leader's influence in choosing the senior leader team and defining the organization's cultural vision and values. In particular, organizational leaders visibly modeled cultural values consistent with written expectations (Kotter & Heskett, 1992) but also reinforced cultural value understanding and adherence through training and coaching, hiring/firing practices, and ties to performance reviews (Schein, 1985).

*The spiritually based firm.* As the data evidenced, CommunityBankCorp's leader founded the organization intentionally to create a firm based on biblical principles. Specifically, combining both leadership style and workplace culture, McCormick's (1994) characteristic workplace spirituality themes of compassion and selfless service (drawn from Christianity and Hinduism) emerged in this study. Results also confirmed Giacalone and Jurkiewicz's (2003) definition of workplace spirituality, noting particularly the way that cultural values promoted participants' sense of connectedness and enjoyment as well as higher levels of work satisfaction. Moreover, data strongly suggested that CommunityBankCorp was, in fact, a spiritually based firm (Conley & Wagner-Marsh, 1998; Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999); the organization aligned with characteristics such as "honesty with self [in the

organizational leader], articulation of the corporation's spiritually-based philosophy, mutual trust and honesty with others, commitment to quality and service, commitment to employees, and selection of personnel to match the corporation's spiritually-based philosophy" (Wagner-Marsh & Conley, 1999, p. 292). The only deviation was that although the top leader and many senior leader team members articulated the ties between biblical principles and the organization's cultural values and hired employees according to cultural fit, they did not require that the cultural fit be due to espousing the religious traditions underpinning cultural values. Finally, results supported Garcia-Zamor's (2003) suggestions that spiritually based workplaces tend to achieve profitability due to employees' strong connections between moral/religious/cultural values, workplace ethics, and job performance.

#### *Internal public relations*

As evidenced through research results, CommunityBankCorp practiced internal public relations with excellence (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Critical to that practice was leaders' willingness to share power with employees, both through participatory decision-making and through employee leadership development.

*Power-control.* The power-control perspective (Berger, 2005; Dozier & L. A. Grunig, 1992 ) was interestingly represented at CommunityBankCorp. Although organizational leaders held the traditional organizational power in that they possessed "the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of others" (Berger & Reber, 2006, p. 5), they also established organizational structures, cultural values, and communication policies and practices that allowed power to be shared by employees (L. A. Grunig,

1992). The leaders seemed less interested in satisfying their own power desires and more interested in sharing power in order to more fully develop organizational buy-in, unity, and leadership among employees. In addition, the Chief Relationship Officer worked closely with the founder/CEO as part of the senior leader team, underscoring Plowman's (1998) and O'Neil's (2003) previous studies regarding top management's effect on organizational public relations. This commitment from CommunityBankCorp's leadership, along with public relations access to the dominant coalition, seemed to negate potential power imbalances and afforded organizational public relations practitioners the power necessary to influence company decisions (Berger, 2007; Berger & Reber, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2000, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Lauzen, 1992). In addition, although the public relations practitioners clearly exerted influence, the company structure, culture, and communication policies and practices seemed to allow voice for employees (Karlberg, 1996), without requiring the intercession of those in public relations positions. Thus far in the organization's history, shared power and opportunities for internal public members' voices to be heard have made dissensus and activism (Holtzhausen, 2007; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) as well as omega tactics (Berger & Reber, 2006) unnecessary. In addition, although participant observations and in-depth interviews did not reveal the existence of multiple power coalitions across the organization (Berger, 2005, 2007), employees and employee groups clearly hold power and influence—by organizational design.

*Excellence.* In addition to access to the dominant coalition, CommunityBankCorp's public relations worldview and practices seemed to align

with other characteristics found in the excellence study (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002). These included a two-way symmetrical communication worldview (Dozier et al., 1995; Murphy, 1991, Spicer, 1997), organizational leaders' non-authoritarian leadership style, commitment to symmetrical internal communication (as evidenced in part by their close interpersonal relationships with their employees), shared power and collaborative decision-making (empowerment) that fosters teamwork and values employees as people, organic structure, and greater employee satisfaction resulting from internal public relations excellence. The findings also supported Hatch's (1997) assertion that participative culture fosters lateral in addition to top-down communication, and underscored Asif and Sargeant's (2000) idea of employee-leader communication symmetry as well as Dolphin's (2005) focus on internal communication as employee-leader relationship building rather than information dissemination.

*Internal public relations.* Beyond the excellence study comparisons, contrary to Wright's (1995) suggestion, CommunityBankCorp public relations practices relied very little on journalistic functions, focusing instead on face-to-face communication to build stronger internal relationships. In addition, findings supported the idea that positive communication facilitates formation of trusting employee-leader relationships (Jo & Shim, 2005). This study also aligned with my own previous research (McCown, 2005a, 2006) to affirm transformational leadership (which, by nature is also authentic) employed with individualized consideration strategies as enhancing internal public relations excellence, employee communication, relationship building, and leader-employee trust. The study suggests that within the context of a

spiritually based firm, the principle-centered and servant leadership styles (also authentic), when coupled with a desire to transform, particularly enhanced internal public relations excellence.

*Workplace communication climate.* Creating a climate of “right,” “just,” and “fair” treatment, CommunityBankCorp enhanced employee communication and employee-leader trust, supporting Ruppel and Harrington’s (2000) previous research. In addition, although not specifically tested in this study, it could be inferred from the organization’s rapid growth in a short period of time that CommunityBankCorp’s open, positive communication climate has increased employee identification with the company, leading to business success and strengthened organizational reputation (Smidts, Pruyn, & vanRiel, 2001). The organization also exhibited factors identified by Young and Post (1993) indicating effective employee communication, especially its face-to-face communication emphasis and its understanding of employee communications as process over product.

Although previous research by DeBussy et al. (2003) advocated use of new media—particularly company intranets—as enhancing internal communication, CommunityBankCorp demonstrated preference for limiting the use of such technology to information-sharing only. Rather, face-to-face communication seemed more critical for successful internal relationship-building.

*Leader-follower communication.* Results indicated that CommunityBankCorp’s leader-follower communication supported Therkelsen and Fiebich’s (2003) assertion regarding the primacy of the employee public and the critical use of frontline supervisors. In particular, the organization created shared



vision and goals through employee communication practices (Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Fairhurst, 1993; Farmer et al., 1998; Haas et al., 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982), with emphasis on the senior leader team members continuing to deliver the organizational vision consistently through word and deed (Romm, 1999). However, although CommunityBankCorp's vision communication did trickle out across the organization, employees were not constrained in their access to upper-level leaders (particularly due to both flat organizational structure as well as leadership style), thus suggesting that unlike Fairhurst's (1993) study, all employees at all levels are responsible for daily vision implementation and sustenance; relatedly, CommunityBankCorp CEO and the senior leader team members felt strongly that their internal communication policies were effective due largely to their interpersonal interactions with employees throughout the organization, yielding results supporting several previous studies (Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Kim, 2002; Sagie, 1996; Sobo & Sadler, 2002). These results also opposed Pincus et al. (1991), who suggested that CEOs found their direct communication with employees below middle-management level to be limited, therefore making internal communication policies less effective.

*Relationship management.* As results suggest, CommunityBankCorp's internal public relations was framed around relationship building as opposed to information dissemination, persuasion, or manipulation, following a current public relations paradigm noted by numerous scholars (Ehling, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Flynn, 2006; J. E. Grunig, 1992; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000a). The organization's employment of two-way, symmetrical public relations added organizational value

through building mutually beneficial relationships between leadership and the internal public (Broom et al., 1997, 2000; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000b; Ledingham et al., 1999). Treating its internal public as its most strategic constituency, CommunityBankCorp demonstrated tacit understanding of J. E. Grunig and Huang's (2002) assertions that relationships should be strengthened in internal as well as external publics. With regard to Hon and J. E. Grunig's (1999) relationship antecedents, findings revealed strong presence of control mutuality (as evidenced through empowerment and participatory decision-making), trust (between leaders and employees as well as across the organization), satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Aligning with Ledingham (2001), CommunityBankCorp strengthened relationships between the organization and its internal public through identifying commonalities, particularly the company's cultural values. Similar to Bruning's (2002) study, the company's high employee retention rate suggested a link between relationship building and organizational commitment.

#### *Employee leadership development*

The confluence of specific leadership styles, spiritually based organizational culture, and excellent internal public relations encouraged employee leadership development at CommunityBankCorp, as findings clearly revealed. Through authentic, transformational, servant, and principle-centered leader influence and encouraged by positive, biblical cultural values as well as open, symmetrical communication, employees themselves were inspired to authentic development (Gardner et al., 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). This process of discovering themselves

and their own potential, coupled with intentional strategies for honing leadership skills and regular leadership training sessions, led to increased employee leadership development. As expressed through the findings, CommunityBankCorp leaders manifested a strong sense of responsibility to “grow” their employees and prepare them to be the organization’s future leadership.

### Theoretical Development and Interpretations

#### *Theoretical Interpretation*

Study results seemed to fit well with previous normative assumptions regarding the interplay of leadership style and internal public relations excellence (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002); in particular, CommunityBankCorp’s non-authoritarian leadership fostered public relations access to the dominant coalition, a two-way symmetrical communication worldview, commitment to symmetrical internal communication, shared power and collaborative decision-making, and organic structure. However, I believe this study’s findings went beyond simply supporting enactment of a non-authoritarian leadership style; instead, results demonstrated that the founder/leader’s vision and faith drove employment of authentic leadership style (specifically through transformational, servant, and principle-centered leadership strategies) characterized by a commitment to excellent internal communication/public relations. The top leader and senior leader team members’ use of this specific leadership style promoted open, two-way symmetrical communication between leaders and employees.

In addition, the founder/leader’s vision and faith fostered establishment of a spiritually based workplace culture involving both constant communication and

clearly defined behavioral expectations based on biblical principles and shared values. Although no expectations existed for employees to actually share the leader's faith tradition, findings indicated that employees agreed with the cultural values stemming from spiritual principles, and both appreciated and wanted to meet the ensuing behavioral expectations. I believe in this case, the leader's spirituality as well as his way of communicating it—matter-of-factly and non-coercively—demonstrated a value and respect for his employees; in this way, he cultivated and advanced open, two-way symmetrical communication and participative decision-making leading to internal public relations excellence.

Interestingly, results indicated that participants had little (or no) desire for major organizational changes. This revelation contrasts with the excellence study's (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) assertion that turbulent environment and change bring about greater public relations excellence. Perhaps such a contrast exists because, as shared in chapter 4, CommunityBankCorp was created due to the founder's own sense of frustration when his applied "turbulence" did not bring about change or excellence in his previous workplace. In addition, numerous study participants expressed dissatisfaction with their previous workplace situations, citing a desire to be part of an organization striving to "do things right," with excellence. Another reason for the contrast with previous assumptions regarding the role of turbulence might be because when an organization embodies a high degree of public relations excellence, employees find little reason for dissatisfaction, thereby eliminating the need for them to create turbulence or activist situations to improve leader-employee communication and relationships. According

to findings, participants expressed greatest concern over whether the organization would be able to maintain its current state of excellence as it grew larger. I believe these results suggest not so much a desire for maintaining status quo as a desire not to “lose” that which employees feel most strongly about: relational strength, organizational unity, and the opportunity for their own empowerment and leadership development. As the study illustrates, these three outcomes resulted directly from the confluence of authentic leadership style (expressed through transformational, servant, and principle-centered strategies), a spiritually based workplace culture, and internal public relations excellence.

Because I also share a similar faith tradition and values/principles with CommunityBankCorp’s leadership and culture, I was keenly aware of the potential for personal bias to produce skewed or misinterpreted study results. Throughout the research process, I worked diligently to write reflexive memos and insert observer comments to bracket this bias as effectively as possible. Yet I cannot deny a certain level of satisfaction with the findings. Discovering that spirituality not only “matters” in this organization’s success—at one level it actually drives it—made me feel somewhat validated in my own faith and beliefs about the values I find foundational to public relations excellence. Does this undermine my study’s validity? I do not believe so. In addition to constant reflexivity, I employed numerous strategies designed to heighten validity, including triangulation in data collection, sound craftsmanship in field research and data analysis, lengthy fieldwork duration, attempts toward saturation, negative case analysis, and post-interpretation communication with participants through a member check, which upheld the study’s accuracy (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967; Kvale, 1995; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995; Wolcott, 2001). After the third of 21 interviews, when “three in a row” indicated an extremely high level of participant satisfaction, I even began wrapping up each participant interview with the question, “Okay, this sounds too good to be true. Is it really for real?” Participants eagerly responded that although of course no organization is perfect, CommunityBankCorp comes close, and their positive experiences were, indeed, quite real. Finally, I was further reassured of the study’s accuracy and validity by the organization’s diversity in terms of its employees’ faith traditions (and no faith tradition)—even among senior leader team members—as well as participants’ insistence that leadership’s behavioral and values expectations did not include espousing a particular “flavor” of spirituality.

*Model development for internal relationship building*

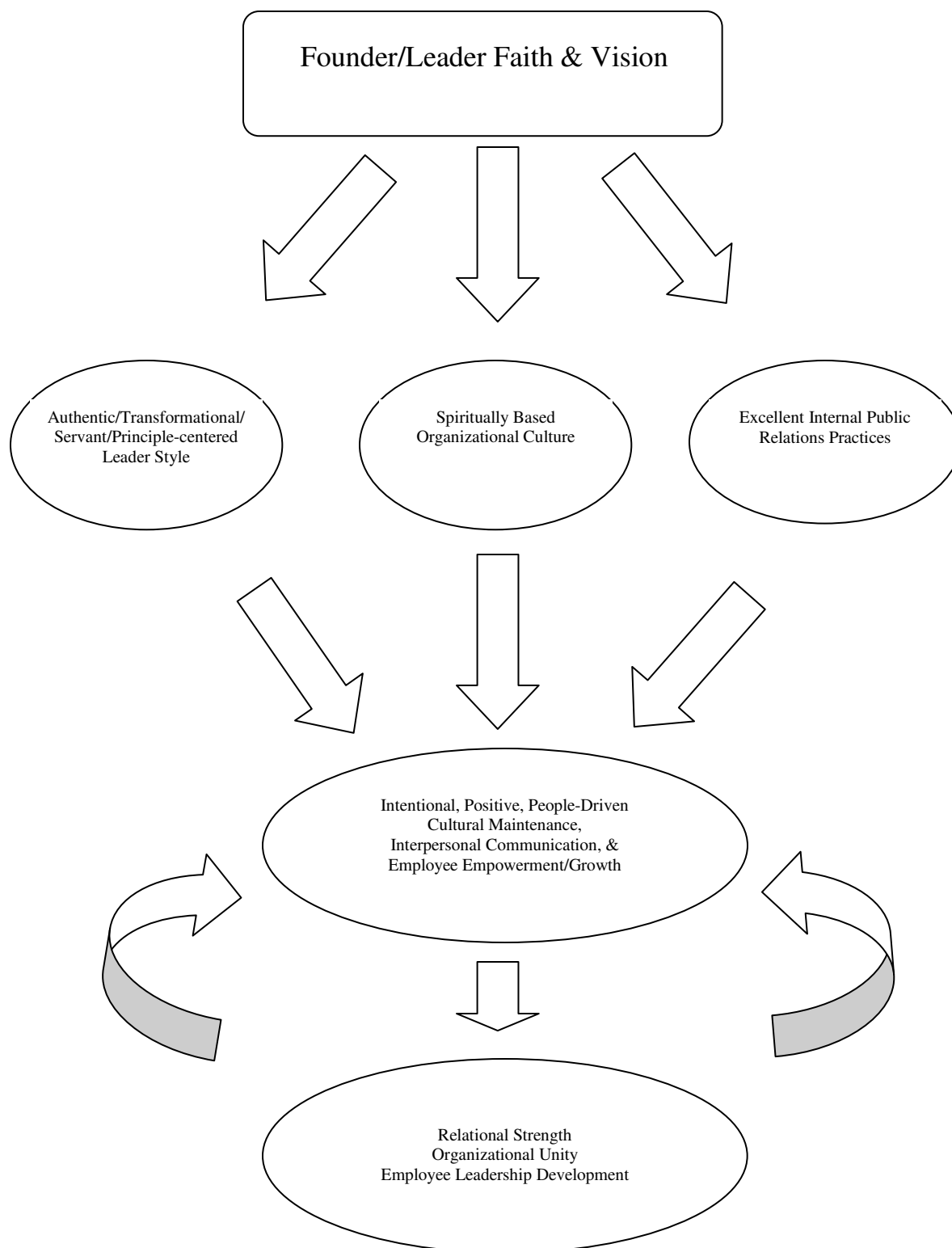
Based on the data and resulting interpretations, I propose a working model to describe my findings and provide a basis from which to move forward with future research and theory development, to better understand the interplay of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations and their confluence’s resulting outcomes. Although this model provides a helpful visual description of my case study organization’s situational realities, and, through testing and refinement, may eventually depict normative theory for internal relationship building, I recognize its limitation; as a two-dimensional, linear drawing, it cannot completely describe the complex nature of the research phenomena’s interactions and confluences.

Nonetheless, I believe it provides a useful springboard for future testing and theory

refinement regarding internal relationship building. Several theoretical propositions explain components of the proposed model:

1. An organizational leader's faith and vision can drive leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations processes.
2. Leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations processes influence and intersect with each other to create specific cultural values, leader-employee interaction characteristics, and communication values.
3. The confluence of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations processes forms the basis for relationship-building and employee leadership development outcomes.
4. Relationship strength, organizational unity, and intentional leadership development perpetuate the organization's espoused leadership style/model, cultural values, and internal public relations excellence, thus serving as the keys to organizational success.

Applying these theoretical propositions, the proposed model (see Figure 1) depicts the organization researched in my study. Based on study findings, the organizational founder's/top leader's faith and vision drives the entire organization, providing a strong foundation from which to establish a specific leadership style—authentic, transformational, principle-centered, and servant; organizational culture—spiritually based; and excellent internal public relations processes and practices—two-way symmetrical. These three elements, represented by the three ovals, exert influence on each other; as participants noted, changing any one of these elements (i.e., enacting a different leadership style or constraining open, two-way internal



*Figure 1.* McCown's proposed model of internal relationship building in CommunityBankCorp.



communication) would greatly affect the other components' ability to exist in their current state. Moreover, these three elements work consistently and cooperatively with each other to foster intentional, positive, and people-driven cultural maintenance, interpersonal communication, and employee empowerment/growth. Specifically, cultural maintenance elements, as noted by participants, encompass strategies such as practices of hiring/firing according to cultural fit, cultural storytelling, and intentional cultural training. In addition, interpersonal communication is characterized by frequent, open, timely, and two-way interactions between leaders and employees—evidence of internal public relations excellence. Finally, employee empowerment/growth stems from intentional leadership training, participatory idea generation and decision-making, and control mutuality.

The organizational realities depicted in the oval resulting from the confluence of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations practices combine to produce a hybrid environment which nurtures relational strength, organizational unity, and employee leadership development. As the data revealed, relational strength grows out of trust, control mutuality, organizational commitment and loyalty, motivation/productivity, and job satisfaction/enjoyment. In addition, organizational unity is demonstrated through participants' high dedication to teamwork and commitment to "living out" the organization's mission, vision, and values. Finally, employee leadership development clearly occurs through specific leadership training and coaching sessions, leader modeling, and intentional career path planning. In turn, these three outcomes feed back into the environment to

perpetuate the organization's defining characteristics, ultimately leading to organizational unity and success.

Although I believe this model can serve as a basis for further theoretical development to explain internal public relationship-building, it very likely will undergo revisions as further testing occurs. For example, upon reflection, I may determine that due to the nature of servant leadership, the model could actually be reversed from top to bottom, more accurately depicting the founding leader's vision and faith as the foundational element out of which the rest of the organization grows. In addition, to more effectively show the interplay of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations, double-sided arrows connecting the ovals—or even overlapping oval—might prove useful. Another revision may heighten the importance of assessment within the organization; although within chapter 4's findings I noted performance reviews (which include evaluation of employees' adherence to cultural values) under the umbrella of cultural maintenance, their importance may warrant granting assessment a specific mention within the model. Likewise, because participants noted that listening plays such a large role in achieving internal public relations excellence, it, too, may warrant a specific mention within the model.

### Implications on Theory and Practice

#### *Theoretical Implications*

Although many studies have examined dyadic relationships of leadership style influence on public relations and on organizational culture, or organizational culture influence on public relations, no research was found that explored the confluence of

all three and their resulting effect on a spiritually based organization's ability to achieve strong internal relationships. My findings enhance understanding of how these phenomena come together to form a hybrid context in which relationship building becomes the key to organizational success.

Previous studies (i.e., Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002) suggested that authoritarian leadership style was not conducive to internal public relations excellence, and, by inference, to strong employee-leader relationship building. Few studies, however, (exceptions include my own as well as Aldoory & Toth, 2004, which was limited to leader preferences identified by public relations practitioners rather than all organization employees) attempted to identify a leadership style or styles that would actually strengthen public relations excellence and relationship-building. My findings indicate that authentic leadership style as enacted through transformational, principle-centered, and servant leadership strategies positively influenced internal public relations and led to strong relationship-building, not only between leaders and employees but also among employees at various levels across the organization. Key to this success was the leadership's value for employees as people as well as a desire to serve them and empower them to do their jobs and reach their potential. Despite assertions that organic, open, participatory cultures are most conducive to excellent internal public relations (Dozier et al., 1995; J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002), no studies examined the influence of a spiritually based organizational culture on employee communication. This study indicated that commitment to specific principles (in this case, biblically based principles) that elevate valuing people through respectful, open communication has a

profound influence on the organization's ability to practice excellent internal public relations. Overall, the combination of authentic, transformational, principle-centered, and servant leadership; open, respectful, participatory culture based on biblical principles; and excellent internal public relations resulted in a hybrid context that fostered strong relationship-building processes and outcomes as well as a commitment to employee leadership development.

My proposed model for internal public relationship-building further offers scholars a theoretical understanding of how the faith and vision of an organization's founder/top leader can drive the enactment of particular leadership styles, organizational culture, and internal communication. Through intentionality, positivity, and value for people in maintaining culture, interpersonal communication, and employee empowerment/growth, organizational leadership—working with those responsible for internal public relations—can build strong relationships, promote organizational unity, and develop employees as leaders to create a self-perpetuating cycle of increased organizational success.

### *Implications on Practice*

This study poses several implications for applied practice of internal public relations. As the theoretical implications propose, these applications bring together leadership style, organizational culture, and internal communication to enhance relationship building, organizational unity, and employee leadership development.

First, organizational leaders can and perhaps should allow their faith and vision to contribute meaningfully to the types of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal communication practices promoted within an organization. As

CommunityBankCorp has demonstrated, spirituality can provide a strong foundation for shared organizational values and behavioral expectations/principles. However, leaders must be careful to maintain respect for employees from other faith traditions or no faith traditions in order to foster employee buy-in to those values, expectations, and principles.

Second, enactment of authentic, transformational, principle-centered, and servant leadership styles coupled with open, two-way symmetrical internal communication within a spiritually based organizational culture should, according to the model, produce positive, people-driven cultural values, interpersonal communication, and employee empowerment/growth. In praxis, leaders and public relations professionals must be consistent, intentional, and unified in maintaining these specific leadership styles, cultural values, and excellent communication processes. Commitment to constant training and reinforcement will be required across all organizational levels. In addition, leaders must employ careful hiring and firing practices based on foundational cultural values, behavioral expectations, and principles. In short, for the model to work, the organization must “practice what it preaches.”

Finally, the resulting outcomes of relational strength, organizational unity, and employee leadership development will feed back into maintaining organizational success over time. Special attention must be paid to encouraging these outcomes from the top leadership trickling out through mid-level leaders to employees at all levels. Again, intentional and consistent organization-wide training, modeling, and mentoring will help ensure a perpetuating cycle of success. As leaders model positive,

respectful relationship building and as appropriate hiring/firing practices (with careful attention to cultural fit) are employed, employees at all levels should begin to emulate this behavior. Public relations professionals, through facilitating face-to-face communication as well as through cultural maintenance strategies such as vision/values communication, storytelling, and relationship-building informally and through activities, should help to facilitate this perpetuating cycle as well.

### Methodological Limitations and Future Research

#### *Sampling Limitations*

Although I attempted to achieve purposive and maximum variation sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Potter, 1996; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995) in this study, there is a possibility that I was not as successful as I desired. My encultured informant initially provided me with contacts for three senior leader team members. In turn, I snowball sampled (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Potter, 1996; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 1995), asking participants for names of employees at all levels who might be willing to meet with me and who might be able offer a variety of perspectives on the organization due to their geographic location, their position, or their level of organizational engagement. Potentially, participants may have provided contacts for people most like themselves in perspective. In addition, due to the “flatness” of the organization, many participants actually attended senior leader team meetings or were considered “mid-level.” Ideally, I should have included a greater percentage of entry-level or branch employees to ensure maximum variation; this under-representation may be mildly problematic. It was also difficult to discern whether I was achieving theoretical sampling, because, based on their responses to my questions, participants

at all levels appeared capable of addressing the range of themes emerging as the study progressed. Additionally, although I sampled until I seemed to be approaching saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and until I had considered all emerging negative cases and rival interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003), time restrictions prevented me from sampling further. Nonetheless, due to the overwhelmingly unified organizational culture and the extremely high degree of employee loyalty and commitment, I feel fairly confident that had I conducted further interviews, little or no new interpretations would have emerged.

#### *Methodological Limitations*

I conducted all of my interviews face-to-face, and at participants' requests several occurred on-site rather than in a more confidential or neutral setting. Not wanting to lose potential participants due to inconvenience for them, I agreed, overcoming the potential for increased risk by holding the interviews in private offices or closed conference rooms and by obtaining extra informed consent regarding confidentiality (see Appendix C). Despite this limitation, I feel fairly confident that participants were not hindered in their ability to speak freely, as evidenced by their willingness to share both positive and negative (though rare) information. The other procedural limitation occurred when holding some interviews in restaurants and coffee shops. At times, loud music and other customers distracted both researcher and participant; however, I tried to overcome these distractions where possible by choosing tables or seating in remote, quieter locations, and by indicating, verbally and nonverbally, my interest and engagement. Also, I only conducted one interview with each participant. Having multiple interviews might have revealed

different perspectives and increased insight into their specific experiences. However, I believe I overcame this limitation with the thoroughness and strength of my interview protocol combined with conducting several follow-up contacts to clarify or probe more deeply on particular questions.

Most importantly, I overcame procedural limitations by triangulating my research through researcher observations and internal document analysis. This produced richer research results and increased internal validity (Brannen, 1991).

#### *Directions for future research*

This current research leads me in several directions for future study connecting the fields of internal public relations, leadership, and organizational culture. I propose conducting additional research to test my cultural model's staying power within the original organization as well as testing its potential applicability in other organizations with similar and dissimilar cultures.

*Model staying power within the original organization.* As a young organization, CommunityBankCorp provides a unique research context. Its founder and most of its key senior leader team members have been with the company from the start. These leaders, brought on not only for their professional expertise but perhaps more importantly for their shared vision and values, have "lived out" their commitment to these values daily in front of their employees. In addition, with the organization's relatively small size, maintaining face-to-face communication—while not without challenges—is relatively easy. As the organization continues to grow, however, it may be more difficult to hire culturally fit new leaders to serve additional branches and remote locations, due to little or no previous connection to the founder



and senior leader team. In addition, continued face-to-face internal public relations strategies will obviously become more of a challenge with organizational growth, as many study participants noted. Thus, conducting follow-up studies in this organization at regular intervals (i.e., two, five, seven, and ten years out, or even further into the future) will help to test the model's staying power within its original organization. It may also be useful to test the model with quantitative measures and by collaborating with other researchers to further triangulate and probe more deeply to understand how the hybrid confluence of leadership style, organizational culture, and internal public relations contributes to employee-leader relationship building.

*Applicability in other organizations.* Obviously, this model will only become a theory if it holds true through widespread testing in a variety of organizations. First, I would advocate testing the model in organizations led by leaders supposed to espouse authentic, transformational, servant, and principle-centered leader styles. In addition, the organizations should be those adhering to similar cultural values, particularly those identified as spiritually based firms. Testing for the presence of excellent internal public relations and its ability to promote strong relationship building within the context of similar leadership style and organizational culture, this research would determine the model's applicability to other similar organizations. If applicability is found, testing the model in dissimilar organizations to determine "universality" would provide still greater understanding of the topic.

### Conclusion

The goals of this study included exploring the confluence of particular leadership styles, excellent internal public relations practices, and leader-employee

relationship management and relational outcomes within the context of a particular type of organizational culture, the spiritually based firm (Wagner-Marsh and Conley, 1999). Through a qualitative organizational case study, I conducted in-depth interviews, participant observations, and internal document analysis; data yielded several resulting theme patterns addressing the four research questions.

The organization's founder/top leader as well as the senior leader team members demonstrated authentic, transformational leadership style practiced via servant and principle-centered leader model employment. In addition, data clearly identified the organizational culture as a spiritually based firm. Based on leader style and ensuing cultural values, internal public relations practices exhibited excellence characteristics including two-way symmetrical communication, which fostered strong leader-employee relationship building evidenced by control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Additional outcomes of the confluence studied included organizational unity and strong leader commitment to employee leadership growth and development.

This study offered several specific contributions to the current body of public relations scholarship. First, this study was the first to examine in-depth the confluence of these three research streams, extending understanding of how specific leadership styles, organizational cultures, and internal public relations practices overlap and influence each other, as well as revealing their potential to build strong leader-employee relationships, foster organizational unity, and facilitate employee leadership development. It also explored the role of spirituality in fostering internal public

relations excellence as well as relationship building, another previously unexplored area in public relationship scholarship.

Due to its unique context and combination of research streams as well as the resulting model, this study is theoretically and descriptively rich, adding to the understanding of internal relationship management found in mainstream public relations research. For too long, employees have been passed over as a critically valuable public and a crucial research topic; yet without them—and more importantly, without greater understanding of how to best build relationships between them and organizational leaders—businesses would experience constraint in their ability to practice both internal and external public relations with excellence.

Ultimately, I believe this dissertation's most important scholarly contribution is its focused attention on one organization's exemplary combination of specific leadership styles, organizational culture, and internal public relations practices that give voice to its employees, clearly identifying internal organizational communication as critical for effective future public relations practice.

## Appendix A

### Sample E-mail or Telephone Script for Interview Request

Date

Dear Name:

I am a doctoral student studying communication and public relations at the University of Maryland. I am interested in studying the role of communication and workplace culture in leader-employee interactions in the workplace. This interest has grown out of my own experiences as a public relations professional and educator for fifteen years.

I have received permission from your organization to conduct interviews with employees to try to better understand your organization's leader, workplace culture and communication interactions between the leader and employees. I am hoping you might be willing to share your thoughts and experiences with me for this project; your insights will help me explore this topic in greater depth. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you will not be penalized in any way for declining to participate. If you do choose to participate, your discussion with me will remain confidential and your name will never be used in any reporting of findings.

I will be conducting the interviews between September and November 2007. Ideally, I'd need about an hour, and the interview could take place at work, in your home, or at another convenient location. Would you be willing to see me? I'd like to contact you within the next week to set up a time for us to meet together.

If you have any questions about this project or about me, please feel free to give me a call at (717) 502-8888 or e-mail me at [nancewrite@gmail.com](mailto:nancewrite@gmail.com). Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nance McCown

Ph.D. Student, Department of Communication

University of Maryland

## Appendix B

5

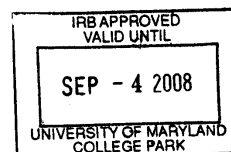
Page 1 of 2

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CONSENT FORM**

<b>Project Title</b>	<i>The Roles of Internal Public Relations, Leadership Style, and Workplace Spirituality in Building Leader-Employee Relationships and Facilitating Relational Outcomes: A Cultural Model</i>
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	<i>This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory and Ms. Nancy McCown in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are involved in communication interactions between your organization's leader and employees at your organization. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the roles of leadership style, internal public relations practices, and organizational culture in facilitating relationship-building and employee development in a specific organization.</i>
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	<i>The procedures involve interviewing several employees at your organization. Interview durations will be held at a public location outside the workplace as jointly determined by you and the researcher. They will last approximately 45 minutes and will be audiotaped. Questions will focus on leadership style as defined by both the leader and employees, internal communications practices, and organizational culture. Examples include: What characteristics define your leader's leadership style? What role does communication play in leader-follower interactions? How does your leader's style, internal communication, and organizational culture influence your personal growth and performance in the workplace?</i>
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p><i>This research project involves making audiotapes of you for purposes of accuracy in data collection. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, you and the researcher will determine together a public location outside the workplace in which your interview may be conducted. Should you choose not to participate in the study, information on your refusal to participate in the study will not be released to the organization and/or your supervisor.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, your name and your organization's name will not be identified or linked to the data at any time. The data you provide through your responses will not be shared with your employer except in aggregate form, grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Only the principal and student investigators will have access to the names of the participants.</i></p> <p><i>Data will be securely stored on the investigators' computers, several hard disks, and audiotapes. Hard copies and audiotapes of the data will remain in the possession of the student investigator at her locked, home office. Informed consent forms will be stored separately from any and all data. All data including audiotapes will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p><i>Please initial:</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study</p>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	<p><i>There may be some risk, in terms of identification, from participating in this research study and being audiotaped. However, all information will be kept confidential as described above. Your organization's name and your name will not be identified or linked to the data you provide at any time unless you give your express consent to release these identities. If the organizational leader provides written permission to release the organization's name, the researcher will distribute copies of this written consent directly to all research participants prior to conducting an interview. In addition, you as an individual study participant should initial the appropriate statement below regarding your desire to remain confidential or have your name associated with your responses.</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to have my name associated with my responses in study publications and documents.</p>

<b>Project Title</b>	<i>The Roles of Internal Public Relations, Leadership Style, and Workplace Spirituality in Building Leader-Employee Relationships and Facilitating Relational Outcomes: A Cultural Model</i>	
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	<i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about leadership, leader-follower interactions/communication, and organizational culture. We hope that, in the future, other people and organizations might benefit from this study through improved understanding of these phenomena.</i>	
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify. You also may feel free to ask questions about the research and/or to decline to answer certain questions. Following your initial interview, the researcher may determine that follow-up questions or even a second interview may help clarify points raised during the interview process. If you agree to be contacted for follow-up, you may indicate your preferred method of contact to ensure confidentiality. In addition, if in-person follow-up is necessary, you and the researcher will determine together a private location in which to meet. Please indicate your consent or decline your consent to follow-up contact by initialing the appropriate statement below:</i></p> <p>_____ I agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p> <p>_____ I do not agree to be re-contacted by the researchers to obtain follow-up information on my interview responses.</p> <p>Please contact me using the following contact information:</p> <p>Phone Number (Optional):</p> <p>Email Address (Optional):</p>	
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Dr. Linda Aldoory in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Aldoory at 301-405-6528 or <a href="mailto:laldoory@umd.edu">laldoory@umd.edu</a>. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<i>Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	



## Appendix C

## On-site Informed Consent Document

**The Roles of Internal Public Relations, Leadership Style, and Workplace Spirituality in Building Leader-Employee Relationships and Facilitating Relational Outcomes: A Cultural Model**

A Research Project by  
Nance McCown  
Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Maryland, College Park

**Interview Risk Statement of Understanding**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, prefer to participate in an interview taking place in my workplace. Having read the University of Maryland IRB-approved consent form, I understand that participating in an interview at my workplace may present minimal risk to me with regard to confidentiality.

---

Date

---

Signature



## Appendix D

### Leader Interview Protocol

Before we begin our conversation, can I get your permission to audiotape the interview, just so I can gather details later?

(If no), Okay, I understand. Let's get started with the interview. . .

(If yes), Great! Let's get started.

#### **(Grand Tour)**

As you know, I'm exploring leadership and employee interactions and communication at your organization. You've been a leader in previous organizations before starting this one, developing and honing your business philosophies and leadership skills for some time. Let's talk first about how and why you started this business.

1. How did you begin this particular organization?
2. With many other similar organizations in existence, what made you decide to start this one?

Probe: What makes this organization different from other similar organizations?

#### **(Related to RQ1: What leadership style is exhibited in the organization's top leader (as self-ascribed and as ascribed by organizational employees)?)**

Next, let's discuss leadership characteristics.

3. How do you define leadership?

Probe: Responsibilities?

4. What do you think characterizes a good leader?

Probe: Skills, traits, interactions?

**(Related to RQ2: How does that particular leadership style influence the organization's workplace culture?)**

Next, let's talk about workplace culture.

5. How would you describe this organization's workplace culture?

Probe: Climate? Atmosphere?

6. What business philosophies or personal values serve as the foundation for this organization's culture?

Probe: Spiritual? Work ethics?

**(Related to RQ3: How does that leadership style influence internal public relations (employee communication) practices?)**

Now let's turn our conversation to communication in the workplace, particularly between you as a leader and your employees.

7. What does it mean for leaders to be effective communicators?

8. How do you as a leader communicate with employees?

Probe: Institution-wide, small group, individually?

Probe: Channels? (memos, internet, telephone, face-to-face, newsletter, other?)

9. What communication strategies do you implement to influence or encourage those in management or leadership positions under you?

Probe: Modeling? Policy-making?

10. How do you think you're doing as a leader trying to communicate effectively with employees?

11. How, specifically, do you articulate (communicate, discuss, present) the organization's mission or vision to employees?

**(Related to RQ4a: How does the confluence of this particular leadership style, the organization's internal public relations practices, and workplace culture facilitate leader-employee relationship building?)**

Next, I'd like us to explore how your leadership style, the organization's communication practices, and workplace culture affect the way you build relationships with your employees.

12. How do you think employees feel about your leadership style, organizational communication, and the workplace culture?

Probe: Personally? About their job productivity or how they feel about their jobs in any way?

13. How would you describe trust between employees and organizational leadership?
14. How would you describe employee commitment to this organization?
15. How would you describe employee perceptions of their own empowerment or control in this organization?
16. How would you describe the level of openness in employees at this organization?

**(Related to RQ4b: What are the resulting outcomes of leader-employee relationship building?)**

Now let's discuss ways that your leadership style, the organizational communication, and workplace culture affect employees in their own growth and development.

17. As you think about the interactions and communication you've had with employees, both individually and in larger groups, how do you think they have affected the way employees do their jobs? Or, how would you LIKE them to influence employee job performance?

Probe: How do these interactions motivate employees?

Probe: How do these interactions empower or enable employees to do their jobs?

Probe: How do these interactions motivate employees with regard to the organization's mission or vision?

Probe: How do these interactions make employees feel as part of the organizational community?

18. How have these interactions and communication influenced employee growth as individuals?

Probe: How do you create a supportive climate for employees personally?

Probe: How do your interactions with employees help meet their individual needs?

Probe: How do your interactions with employees encourage them to reach their potential?

Probe: How have you encouraged employees to grow and change as a result of their interactions and communication with you?

19. How do you empower employees to grow as leaders in the workplace?

That's all the formal questions I have for our interview, but is there anything you would like to add at this point? What should I have asked about that I didn't?

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. May I have a phone number or e-mail from you, just in case I need to clarify something from the interview or ask a follow-up question?

And if you would like a copy of our final report, let me know, and I'll take your address so we can send one to you.

## Appendix E

### Employee Interview Protocol

Before we begin our conversation, can I get your permission to audiotape the interview, just so I can gather details later?

(If no), Okay, I understand. Let's get started with the interview. . .

(If yes), Great! Let's get started.

#### **(Grand Tour)**

As you know, I'm exploring leadership and employee interactions and communication at your organization. But before we get into those questions, I'd like to know a little bit more about you.

1. How did you come to work in this particular organization?
2. What are your particular job responsibilities here?

**(Related to RQ1: What leadership style is exhibited in the organization's top leader (as self-ascribed and as ascribed by organizational employees)?)**

Next, let's discuss this organization's leadership.

3. How do you define leadership?

Probe: Responsibilities?

4. What do you think characterizes a good leader?

Probe: Skills, traits, interactions?

**(Related to RQ2: How does that particular leadership style influence the organization's workplace culture?)**

Next, let's talk about the workplace culture here.

5. How would you describe this organization's workplace culture?

Probe: Climate? Atmosphere?

Probe: Open? Closed? Supportive? Empowering? Stifling? Rigid?

6. What business philosophies or values do you think serve as the foundation for this organization's culture?

Probe: Spirituality? Work ethics?

Probe: To what do you attribute those values? (Organizational mission? Other employees? Leader?)

**(Related to RQ3: How does that leadership style influence internal public relations (employee communication) practices?)**

Now let's turn our conversation to communication in the workplace, particularly between your leader and you as an employee.

7. What does it mean for leaders to be effective communicators?

8. How does your leader communicate with employees?

Probe: Institution-wide, small group, individually?



Probe: Channels? (memos, internet, telephone, face-to-face, newsletter, other?)

9. What does your leader communicate about with you?

Probe: Policies, tasks, vision/mission, other?

10. How, specifically, does your leader articulate (communicate, discuss, present) the organization's mission or vision to employees?

11. How do you think your leader is doing in trying communicate effectively with employees?

**(Related to RQ4a: How does the confluence of this particular leadership style, the organization's internal public relations practices, and workplace culture facilitate leader-employee relationship building?)**

Next, I'd like us to explore how your leader's style, the organization's communication practices, and workplace culture affect the way you build relationships with your leader.

12. How do you feel about your leader's style, organizational communication, and the workplace culture?

Probe: Personally? About how it affects your job productivity or how you feel about your job in any way?

13. How would you describe trust between employees and organizational leadership?

Probe: Your own trust? How well others trust?

14. How would you describe employee commitment to this organization?

Probe: Your own commitment? The commitment of others?

15. How would you describe employee perceptions of their own empowerment or control in this organization?

Probe: Your own empowerment? Empowerment of others?

16. How would you describe the level of openness in employees at this organization?

Probe: Your own openness? Openness of others?

**(Related to RQ4b: What are the resulting outcomes of leader-employee relationship building?)**

Now let's discuss ways that your leader's style, the organizational communication, and workplace culture affect employees in their own growth and development.

17. As you think about the interactions and communication you've had with your leader, both individually and in larger groups, how do you think they have affected the way you do their jobs?

Probe: How do these interactions motivate you?

Probe: How do these interactions empower or enable you to do your jobs?

Probe: How do these interactions motivate you with regard to the organization's mission or vision?

Probe: How do these interactions make you feel as part of the organizational community?

18. How have these interactions and communication influenced your growth as an individual?

Probe: How do you feel your leader supports you personally?

Probe: How do you feel your leader helps you meet individual needs?

Probe: How does your leader encourage you to reach your potential?

Probe: How has your leader encouraged you to grow and change as a result of his interactions and communication with you?

19. How does your leader empower you to grow as a leader in the workplace?

**(For snowball sample)**

20. What other employees do you know who might be considered leaders in the workplace?

21. What other employees do you know who might be willing to talk about their experiences with me?

That's all the formal questions I have for our interview, but is there anything you would like to add at this point? What should I have asked about that I didn't?

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. May I have a phone number or e-mail from you, just in case I need to clarify something from the interview or ask a follow-up question?

And if you would like a copy of our final report, let me know, and I'll take your address so we can send one to you.

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